

ON THE PLAINS WITH CUSTER

EDWIN L. SABIN

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**ON THE PLAINS WITH
CUSTER**

EIGHTH IMPRESSION



ON THE PLAINS WITH CUSTER

THE WESTERN LIFE AND DEEDS OF THE CHIEF WITH
THE YELLOW HAIR, UNDER WHOM SERVED BOY BUGLER
NED FLETCHER, WHEN IN THE TROUBLOUS YEARS
1866-1876 THE FIGHTING SEVENTH CAVALRY HELPED
TO WIN PIONEER KANSAS, NEBRASKA, AND DAKOTA
FOR WHITE CIVILIZATION AND TODAY'S PEACE

BY
EDWIN L. SABIN

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
CHARLES H. STEPHENS
AND PORTRAITS

"The bravest are the tenderest,—
The loving are the daring."

—BAYARD TAYLOR



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TO THE ARMY WOMEN

MOTHERS, WIVES, AND SWEETHEARTS WHO
WORKED AND SMILED AND WEPT AND PRAYED
WHILE SOLDIERS MARCHED AND FOUGHT

FOREWORD

THIS is a story of Ned Fletcher, and the Seventh Regular Cavalry, United States Army, when upon the Western plains they followed the yellow-haired General Custer. Yet it is not all a story of fighting; for to be a good soldier does not mean that one must serve only to fight. Indeed, there are worthy battles other than those with lead and steel, horse and foot. Every earnest citizen is a good soldier. General Custer was as great in peace as in war; in his home as in the field, and he loved his home duties as much as he loved his other duties, which is token of a true man.

General Custer is real to-day. Men and women live who marched with him. As to Ned Fletcher, who may say? A little girl named Fletcher was captured by Cheyennes and Sioux, as Ned's sister was captured; and Chief Cut Nose called her "Little Silver Hair." General Custer would have rescued her, as official records show. Two little children were found in the Cheyenne village on the Washita. In the battle here a bugler boy was wounded just as Ned was wounded. Aye, and at Fort Wallace a little bugler boy was slain. So that boys served in the old Seventh Cavalry, under General Custer. As a brave boy, Ned might have been there, even though by a different name.

FOREWORD

General Custer has left his own story of his plains days in Kansas and Nebraska. It lies before me. Mrs. Custer, his comrade of garrison and camp and march, has written several books about him. They lie before me. There is a biography by one Captain Whittaker, written at the close of the last battle, near forty years ago. With General Sheridan and General Custer upon their campaign against the Cheyennes and the Kiowas was a newspaper reporter, Randolph Keim, who also wrote a book. Chapters have there been, in other books and in magazines, and pamphlets of time ago; and, as I say, men and women are now alive who knew the general. From all these more information should be sought. No one pen can describe so fine a thing as a Man.

So this book must tell of the Custer whom Ned the boy and youth saw; and of affairs in which he took part during that final struggle when the white race would supplant the red race, on the plains of north and south. In the narrative of these years I have tried to show how the white race felt and how the red race felt; for each had their rights and their wrongs, and each did right and did wrong. Out of the result came general good, that the church and the school-house might rise and people might work and play in peace, where formerly stood only the unproductive hide lodges, and the main thought was war and plunder.

EDWIN L. SABIN.

Coronado, California, June 1, 1913.

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By Courtesy of The Century Company

MAJOR-GENERAL GEORGE A. CUSTER

From a Photograph by Brady

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

GEORGE ARMSTRONG CUSTER

Famous American soldier and cavalry leader in the Civil War and on Indian campaigns afterward. A loyal citizen, a tender son, a devoted husband. Family name "Autie"; otherwise called Armstrong; by war correspondents styled "the Boy General"; by the soldiers nicknamed "Old Curly," and "Jack"; entitled by the Indians "the Yellow Hair," "the Long Hair," or, in full, "White Chief with the Long Yellow Hair."

Born at New Rumley, Ohio, December 5, 1839.

Father: Emmanuel H. Custer, of Maryland.

Mother: Maria Ward Kirkpatrick, of Pennsylvania.

Spent his boyhood at New Rumley, on the farm, and with his sister at Monroe, Michigan.

Educated at New Rumley, at the Stebbins Academy (Monroe) and the Monroe "Seminary," and at the Hopedale, Ohio, Normal School.

Appointed to West Point Military Academy, 1857.

Graduates last in his class, 1861.

Assigned as second lieutenant, G Company, Second United States Cavalry.

Three days after leaving West Point reports for duty with General McDowell's army, on the morning of the battle of Bull Run.

Soon detailed as aide-de-camp and assistant adjutant-general on the staff of General Philip Kearny.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

Second lieutenant, Fifth United States Cavalry, 1862, under General Stoneman.

Serves briefly with the Topographical Engineers, 1862.

Appointed aide-de-camp on the staff of General McClellan, June, 1862, with rank of Captain.

After McClellan's removal is appointed first lieutenant, Fifth Cavalry.

On waiting orders, at Monroe, winter of 1862-'63, woos and wins his future wife, Elizabeth Bacon.

Reports for duty as first lieutenant with M Company, Fifth Cavalry, Army of the Potomac, April, 1863.

Appointed aide-de-camp to General Pleasanton, commanding First Division, Cavalry Corps of the Army of the Potomac.

June, 1863, at the age of 23 appointed brigadier general of volunteers, in command of the Second Brigade (the "Michigan" Brigade), Third Division, Cavalry Corps, under General Kilpatrick, and distinguishes himself at the battle of Gettysburg. "The boy general with the golden locks."

Slightly wounded at Culpepper, September, 1863.

Married, February 4, 1864, at Monroe, Michigan, to Elizabeth Bacon, daughter of Judge Daniel S. Bacon, and takes his bride with him to the brigade headquarters camp.

By Sheridan, the new cavalry commander, is given the advance in the various raids.

Transferred to command of the Second Division of Cavalry, and finally September, 1864, to that of the Third Division.

October, 1864, aged 25 is brevetted major-general of volunteers, for gallantry. The youngest in the army.

Continues to lead the Third Division of cavalry, which is conspicuous for its discipline, its dash, and the long hair, cavalier hats and flying red neckties of its men, copied after the well-known Custer garb.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

Eleven horses are shot under him, in battle. In six months his division captures 111 pieces of field artillery, 65 battle-flags, and 10,000 prisoners including seven generals. It does not lose a flag or a gun or meet defeat.

April 9, 1865, he receives flag of truce conveying the first word that General Lee is considering surrender. Thus "the boy general" has fought through from Bull Run to Appomattox.

At the close of the war is ordered with a division of cavalry to Texas.

Offered the command of the cavalry of the army of General Juarez, Mexico, in the conflict with Emperor Maximilian; but by Congress is not permitted to accept.

In 1866 brevetted major-general in the regular army, for war services.

October, 1866, appointed lieutenant-colonel to command the Seventh United States Cavalry, and ordered to Fort Riley, Kansas.

Five years of service, 1866-'71, on the plains of Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado and Indian Territory, resulting in the subjugation of the Kiowas, Arapahos, Cheyennes, Comanches and Apaches in that district.

From 1871 to 1873 stationed with his regiment in Kentucky.

Spring of 1873 ordered with his regiment to Fort Rice, Dakota, for operations among the Sioux. Occupies the new post of Fort Lincoln.

Engages in campaigns along the Yellowstone River, and explores and exploits the Black Hills.

June 25, 1876, aged 37, killed with five companies of his cavalry from which only one man, a Crow scout, escapes, in the battle of the Little Big Horn, Montana, with 3000 Sioux.

ON THE PLAINS WITH CUSTER

I

A WAIF ON THE PRAIRIE

IN every direction wide stretched the lonely brown prairie-land of north central Kansas, 1866. From horizon to horizon not a house of any kind was to be seen, nor even a tree except low lines of willows and occasional cottonwoods marking the courses of streams. Late November's pale blue sky bent mildly over, the steady plains breeze rustled the dried weeds and the sun-cured carpet of buffalo-grass; and Ned Fletcher, trudging wearily, felt that he was a very small boy in a very large world.

However, he was not afraid of the largeness; and as he hastened as fast as he could, with ear alert for sunning rattlesnakes and eye upon a vast herd of buffalo grazing far to the northeast, he was rather glad of the loneliness. Moving objects, ahorse, might mean Indians, and Indians he did not want. Ah no, no, no.

Ned was bare-headed, his tow hair long and matted as if it needed cutting and combing. But who had

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there been, in the Indian camps, to cut or comb a white-boy prisoner's hair? He wore on his body a tattered fragment of stained blanketing, his head thrust through a slit. One foot was supplied with an old moccasin that lacked part of the sole; the other foot had nothing. As he hurriedly walked he limped.

Where he was he did not know. He was still in Kansas, he believed, although one part of this flat prairie-country looked much like another. Since his escape from the Sioux he had been trying to travel straight east; but he had sneaked down crooked stream-beds and had slept some, and now exactly where he might be or how far he might have come, he could not tell.

Somewhere on before were the settlements of the Kansas frontier, out of which was creeping westward the Kansas Pacific Railroad, bound for Denver. North was the Republican Fork emigrant trail to Denver, and south was the Smoky Hill trail. With these, and with the outlying ranches and hamlets which were liable to be encountered, it did seem to Ned that by hook or crook he would be rescued if he only kept going.

Suddenly he stopped short, with lame foot upraised, and peered. He was all ready, like prairie-dog or other timid wild animal, to disappear. This was what alarmed him: the grazing herd of buffalo, resembling a great tract of black gooseberry bushes, had broken and were on the run!

A WAIF ON THE PRAIRIE

As everybody in the far West knew or ought to know, running buffalo were frightened buffalo; and the question naturally would be: "Which has frightened them—white hunters or Indian hunters?" Upon the answer might depend much, even life.

Ned's heart thumped inside his bony chest, under the thin blanket, and he glanced about for hiding-place.

The creek-bed was too far; the earth around was flat and sandy and bald; but near at hand was a curious circular hollow, like a dimple in the brown face of the prairie. Crouching and skimming, Ned darted for it, and plunged in.

This was a buffalo-wallow. In the beginning some old buffalo bull, tormented by flies, had pawed and horned and turned up the sod of a soft spot in the prairie, and there had taken a good roll. Other buffalo bulls had followed him, enlarging the hole as they enjoyed their mud-baths. Now, in late November, the wallow was dry, but it was two feet deep and fifteen feet across.

Behind the sloping edge of the wallow Ned lay close, and peeped over. He was a brave boy, but he shivered with excitement. After he had escaped, and had come so far, and was almost within touch of white people, was he to be re-captured? He couldn't stand it—no, he couldn't stand it, unless he had to. When they have to, people can stand a great deal.

The buffalo were increasing in size rapidly, as with

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their peculiar headlong rolling gallop they came thundering on. There were several thousand of them; the beat of their hoofs merged into a dull roar; over their torrent of black backs floated a yellow spume of dust.

Gazing beyond them anxiously Ned searched for the hunters. He thought that he saw them—some horsemen, veiled in the dust as they so furiously pursued. Were they white horsemen, or red? Then he saw, to his relief, that the course of the tossing herd was past his wallow, not over it. He would not be trampled to death, anyway; and perhaps he would not be seen. And then he saw that a single buffalo had separated from the flying herd, and that had paired off with it a single horseman, to ride it down. *They* were heading almost directly for the wallow.

Ned flattened himself as flat as a horned toad or a lizard, and motionless, watched. He did not dare to stir his head, he dared scarcely to breathe. Indians, as well he knew, had eyes very keen for any movements against the surface of the ground.

The buffalo was running gallantly—head down, tail curved, heavy fore-quarters propelled by light hind-quarters. In its rear pursued the hunter. Ned, peering through a screen of weeds, fastened eyes upon him to read him. He wore a hat; good! He wore a shirt or coat; pretty good! He held a revolver; very good! He rode like a white man; hurrah!

Heart beating afresh, Ned waited a minute longer, to make certain.

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How the buffalo ran! How the hunter rode! It was a big bull buffalo. Ned could see his shaggy head, like a lion's; he fancied that he could see his tongue as it hung foamy and red; almost could he see his glaring eyeballs and hear his panting breath. The horseman—yes, he was white!—was leaning forward, lifting his long-legged bay to the race. His right hand held high a heavy revolver, his left hand gathered the loosely drawn reins; his broad-brimmed hat flared in the breeze that he made; his hair, yellow and free, streamed backward. He gave a wild, exultant halloo, and his horse, lengthening with leap after leap, fairly was eating the space to the straining, lumbering quarry. It took a fast horse to do this; but the buffalo was wounded, for now from his red tongue was dripping something redder still.

Ned had just concluded that the hunter must be a soldier, for his trousers-seams, showing between boot-tops and shirt or coat, bore broad stripes, when he realized also that this chase, like the rest of the chase, was passing his wallow; and that if he did not make himself known he would not be seen. Another minute, and buffalo and rider would be by, and the chances were small that they ever would notice such a small thing as he, behind them. With a spring, out rushed Ned; waving his arms and calling, he ran forward across the prairie.

His thoughts and eyes were on the rider—that white man rider. He was regardless of the buffalo,

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now—but the buffalo proved not regardless of him. Into the very path of the onward scouring chase went Ned, waving and shouting; and veering at sharp tangent the buffalo instantly charged for him. The buffalo's little tail flicked up, in half-cocked manner, his shaggy head dropped lower, and he made a savage lunge at what he thought was a new enemy.

Ned paused not for parley. An enraged buffalo bull coming full tilt won't listen to talk, and the fact that Ned was only a boy made no difference to this big fellow. In a sideways jump Ned dodged and turned and made for his wallow again.

This seemed the thing to do. Now he forgot about the rider and thought about the buffalo. He had small hope of beating him, for a buffalo can run as fast as an ordinary horse and this buffalo was very angry. Ned imagined that the hot breath of the great animal was burning his back—that the hard stubby horns were grazing him there; his legs were weak and his feet heavy; and nervously glancing behind him, as he ran, he stumbled, sprawling head over heels. When he should stop rolling, then what?

He stopped, and scrambling for his feet he looked quickly, poised on hands and knees, before he should rise. His next movements depended upon the buffalo. The buffalo had halted, as if surprised. He was almost towering over, so huge he stood; he was surveying Ned, his matted hump high, his bearded hairy head low again, his tongue dripping crimson froth, his red-

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streaked eye-balls standing out amidst his matted locks, his throat rumbling, his forehoofs flinging the dirt in defiance. As soon as he could debate a little over what had upset his new enemy, he would charge again.

Ned, crouched on hands and knees, stared at the buffalo; the buffalo, rumbling and pawing and bleeding, stared at Ned.

But the rider—the rider! With rapid thud of hoofs he galloped. “Keep down, lad! Keep down!” he shouted, in clear ringing voice. Ned never forgot how he looked, as with bright yellow hair floating, crimson necktie-ends at his throat streaming, black hat-brim flaring, wide blue eyes in bronzed moustached face blazing, bridle free and revolver levelled, like a whirlwind he passed the great beast—firing as he did so—and now at full speed passing Ned also he leaned, Indian-wise, grasped Ned under the arms and with strong heave hoisted him right up to the saddle.

For an instant longer the horse, with Ned thus suspended beside him, careened on. Then in response to vigorous command and tug of gauntleted hand holding both revolver and lines, he wheeled and stopped. Giddy, clinging desperately to the buckskin waist, Ned gazed before. The great bull was prone, feebly kicking his last. Ned looked up, into a face looking down. It was a handsome, manly face; lean and deeply tanned, with sunny blue eyes, broad high forehead, straight nose, flowing tawny moustache, firm cleft chin, all under a large soft-brimmed black slouch

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hat, from beneath which the bright yellow hair fell in long curly waves to the shirt collar. This shirt collar was generous and rolling, of blue flannel with a white star at either point in front. Under the collar lay a long soft tie of crimson silk, its ends loosely knotted and hanging down outside a fringed buckskin coat. Between skirt of coat and tops of riding-boots showed dusty trousers of army blue, with broad yellow stripes down the seams. Altogether, to Ned's quick and wondering eye he was a most attractive and remarkable individual.

Looking down, while Ned looked up, he smiled heartily, and said :

"Well, we got the buffalo before he got you, didn't we? Let's see."

With a "Whoa, Phil! Steady, now!" to the horse, he carefully lowered Ned and set him back upon the ground; then swinging easily off he dismounted, and leaving the horse to stand, with revolver ready he approached the buffalo. But the buffalo was stone dead.

"All right," he called back, to Ned, who was anxiously watching. "Hurrah! He's a big fellow, isn't he! And there come the dogs! Hi!" and raising a cow-horn from its sling to his lips he blew a stirring, rollicking blast. "Watch them leg it! The pace was too hot for them, this time. Well," he spoke, more directly, to Ned, "come over here, and tell me

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about yourself. You're a white lad, aren't you? My name's Custer—Autie Custer; what's yours?"

"Ned Fletcher," faltered Ned. "I'm a white boy, but I've been captive with the Indians. Now I'm escaping. You—you're an officer in the army, I guess."

"What makes you think so?" The query was quick and crisp—with blue eyes twinkling behind it.

Ned hesitated. His gaze strayed to the blackish specks, said to be dogs, rapidly nearing across the prairie; and returned to this straight, lithe, square-shouldered figure, standing there so fascinating in face and form and garb. Ned could not tell exactly why, but he felt that this man was every inch a soldier and a leader. If he wasn't an officer he ought to be, anyway. So Ned hazarded:

"By those stripes—and you've got stars on your shirt collar."

The blue eyes twinkled merrily.

"Oh, those stars don't count for anything. That's a sailor shirt. And maybe I stole the pants. My wife calls me 'Autie,' the men call me 'Jack,' but once in a while somebody calls me 'Colonel,' so I suppose I'm a sort of an officer, after all. But here—if you're a white boy you've got to have something on. Aren't you cold? You must be cold. Take my coat. Captive to the Indians, you say? Where? How did that happen? Put on that coat, and tell me. I'll be cutting out this buffalo's tongue. Did you ever see

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a buffalo's tongue cut out? It's quite a job, isn't it! Hi! Hello, pups! (For the dogs were arriving.) Down, Maida! Down, Flirt! Blucher! Good dog, Byron! Where's Rover? Oh, yes; I see. Hurry, Rover, or you'll be too late. There! That'll do. Next time you hunt with the old man you'll save your wind for the final spurt, won't you!'

The dogs were splendid animals: three gaunt, rough-coated stag hounds, a deer hound, a fox hound or two. They came in panting and eager, whining and gambolling and sniffing right and left. Colonel Custer knelt and whipping out his hunting-knife pried open the dead bull's mouth and slashed at the thick tongue.

Ned didn't want to put on the buckskin coat, but he had been ordered to, so he did, and dropped the ragged blanket. The coat almost covered him. While the dogs nosed him and excitement still reigned, he answered the questions.

"The Dog Soldiers killed my father and burned the ranch and took my mother and sister and me away with them. My mother is dead—they made her work too hard (and Ned choked up), and I don't know where my sister is but I'm going to find her."

"Where was the ranch?"

"On the Bijou in Colorado."

"How long ago?"

"About a year. I was traded to the Sioux. But when I had a chance I ran away."

"From their village?"

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"No, sir; on the march."

"Who were the chiefs?"

"The Sioux chief was Pawnee Killer, and the Cheyenne chief was Cut Nose. I ran away from Pawnee Killer. My sister's out with old Cut Nose's Cheyennes, I think."

"Where do you want to go, my boy?"

"Anywhere, so that I find my sister."

"All right." Colonel Custer had finished cutting out the tongue. Now he wiped his knife on the buffalo's wool, and stood. "We'll take you back to Riley, first. That's where I live—Fort Riley. It isn't far; a day's ride. We're out on a little scout. There comes my orderly, now. The lazy fellow! Eh, Phil?" and the handsome bay horse, thus addressed, pricked his ears. "First we leave the orderly, then we leave the dogs, and we kill a buffalo and pick up a boy! That will be something to tell the old lady when we get back."

About this handsome, energetic army officer was an air so happy-go-lucky and boyish that Ned, another boy, found himself already loving him.

Now the orderly galloped up. He wore fatigue cap and blouse and trousers, of the regulation service blue; and by yellow braid and chevrons and the brass horn hanging from his shoulder he was a bugler.

He arrived dusty and red, his horse much blown; pulling short he saluted, trying not to stare. Colonel Custer drew himself up very tall and straight and

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military, surveyed him sternly and spoke gruffly—although Ned felt certain that those blue eyes held a twinkle.

“Take this boy on before you, Odell. Where’s the rest of the troop?”

“Yes, sir. Following the buffalo, sir.”

“Where have you been?”

“Trying to catch up with you, sir.”

“Oh! I see.” And as Colonel Custer turned, to his own horse, and tied the buffalo tongue to the saddle, Ned fancied not only the twinkle in the eyes but a smile under the yellow moustache.

“Well, boy, you’re to get aboard with me, the general says,” said Bugler Odell. “Give me a grip on ye and I’ll help ye up. But you ought to have coverin’ for your legs. It’s cold, ridin’. Use that blanket, now, I see lyin’ there.”

“No. I’ve got enough,” asserted Ned, eyeing the blanket fragment disdainfully. The heavy buckskin coat fell below his knees, and he was used to the cold air.

“Yes; wrap that piece of blanketing around you, or you’ll wear a hole through Odell’s saddle-skirts,” bade Colonel Custer, as he vaulted astride his own saddle.

“You hear what the general says,” reminded Bugler Odell, soberly. “Fetch the blanket and come on, now.”

So Ned, understanding that it was the custom, evi-

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dently, to obey whatever the man with the yellow hair directed, gingerly lifted the fragment of dirty blanket, and approached the bugler's stirrup. With one foot upon it, and the trooper hauling him stoutly, he right soon was seated before the low pommel, where he tucked the blanketing around his legs.

"Ready?" queried the bugler. "Here we go, and you'd better hang tight, for the general won't wait. That hoss o' his is a tarrer."

"The general? Is he a general! He said he was colonel," stammered Ned, perplexed, as following the man with the yellow hair away they went, at jolting trot which speedily broke into a smoother gallop.

"Who? General Custer? Sure, he's left'nant-colonel o' regulars, commandin' the Sivinth Cavalry; but he was brigadier-general and brevet major-general o' the volunteers in the war, and the youngest one in the whole army, too. Yes, and it's brevet o' major-general o' regulars he's just been given. So 'general' he's to be called, and don't you forget it."

"*General* Custer! Oh, I know *General* Custer! He was the 'boy general'!" exclaimed Ned, excited. "My father knew him, I mean. He was my father's general. Now I remember. I didn't think, at first."

"Well, he's a good soldier and a fine man," commented the bugler, succinctly; "and of the Sivinth Cavalry he's goin' to make a regiment, or I'm much mistaken."

The carcass of the dead buffalo bull had been left

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behind. The prairie before was free of other buffalo, for all the great fleeing herd had vanished. General Custer, riding superbly, his crimson tie ends and his yellow hair streaming together, his dogs panting on either side and at his heels, was rapidly increasing his lead; his young horse was a racer and a thoroughbred, and the trooper's horse was heavy and ordinary. Clinging tight to the mane with his hands and to the saddle-flaps with his shins, Ned, secure and not a whit afraid (he had ridden bare-legged and bare-back too often, with the Indians) enjoyed the gallop, but wished that they might be nearer to "the general."

Black specks, moving about over the surface of the prairie, appeared before. The general slackened pace, and as the bugler and Ned approached he ordered, over his shoulder:

"Sound the rally."

Bugler Odell attempted to salute, to pull his horse down to a trot, and to raise his bugle to his mouth—all in a moment. But the horse shook its head and champed and tugged, and the bugle, swinging between the man rider and the boy rider, wedged fast. Odell muttered several angry, chagrined remarks.

"I'll blow it," offered Ned, friendly. "Shall I?"

"You!" grunted Trooper Odell. "It's the rally, by the bugle, the general wants. If you'll hold this hoss a second, now——" and red and flustered he hauled hard.

"I'll blow it. I can," repeated Ned, eagerly, anx-

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ious to show his mettle and to help the embarrassed Odell.

As the obstinate horse pranced the bugle swung free again, jerked fairly around so that Ned needed only to reach and grab it. He promptly applied it to his lips (while clutching tight with his one hand and his two shins), and blew the rally the best that he could. Clear and passably regular pealed the high notes.

"Good enough, b' gorry!" muttered Odell. "But what'll the general say? Give me that horn."

The moment that the last note died away the general had wheeled his horse, to gaze.

"Who blew that call?" he shouted.

"I did," announced Ned, bravely. "Mr. Odell was managing his horse, and he didn't say I might but I did."

"The boy took the horn before I could stop him, sir," explained the flurried Odell. "I'll blow it now, sir. This pesky hoss——" and Bugler Odell jerked savagely at the bit, pulling his mount to its haunches.

"He blew it mighty well, then," declared General Custer. "Try it again, boy. Put more force behind it, so those soldiers yonder'll hear. We're sounding the rally for them to come; see?"

Tremendously Ned blew—glueing his lips and puffing his cheeks and popping his eyes. Far pealed the notes, across the brown prairie. And now the specks must have heard, for by twos and threes they were

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coming, ever growing larger, and turning into mounted men.

The general jogged easily, with Bugler Odell and Ned close behind him.

"Where did you learn the bugle?" he demanded.

"From my father," answered Ned, proudly. "He knew all the army calls."

"He did, did he? Where'd he learn them?"

"In the war. He was a bugler."

"What regiment?"

"Sixth Michigan Cavalry."

"What!" General Custer stopped his horse, as he turned in the saddle and scrutinized Ned, his blue eyes shining. "Was he a Michigander? In my old brigade, then! He was one of my boys! The son or daughter of any of my boys is like one of my own family. Of course you'll come with me to Fort Riley. What do you want to do?"

Sudden resolve seized Ned.

"I'd like to join the army, too, and hunt Indians until I find my sister."

"You shall," declared the general, enthusiastically. "I'll enlist you as a bugler with the Seventh Cavalry, and we'll hunt Indians together and find your sister, I'm sure. Shake hands on it." He skillfully reined his restless bay to the side of the troop horse and extended his hand. With a strong grip his nervous gauntlet closed warmly about Ned's slim scarred fingers. "Now tell me more about your father."

A WAIF ON THE PRAIRIE

So, as they rode slowly, biding the arrival of the soldiery, Ned did: relating to this singularly young general (the youngest, had said Bugler Odell, in the whole army, commanding men, like Ned's father, almost twice his age) the story of how Mr. Fletcher, after the War, had moved to the frontier of Colorado Territory and had located upon a ranch; how outlaw Cheyennes and Sioux, called "Dog Soldiers," had raided the ranch, killing him in the field, burning the buildings and carrying off Ned, Ned's mother, and his sister who was eight.

While the general was asking questions, the other soldiers, responding to the "rally," began to arrive.

II

AT OLD FORT RILEY

EARLY came a lancer, bearing the swallow-forked guidon, his steed blown and wet. The soldiers gathered about him.

Foremost of the riders was a man not a soldier; at least, he looked more like a handsome, gentlemanly desperado. He sat easy and lithe and broad-shouldered; from under his wide-brimmed black hat, fell down upon the shoulders long, curling light hair. Belted about his waist was a pair of ivory-handled revolvers, one at either thigh. He wore shiny, flexible boots reaching to the knee; tight-fitting white doe-skin riding-breeches; a fine blue-flannel shirt open at the throat, and trimmed down the front with red; around his throat was loosely knotted a blue silk handkerchief; upon his hands were well-fringed gauntlet gloves. His skin was fair, with just a touch of sun-brown; a long blonde moustache drooped along either side of a firm clean chin; his nose was a bold hawk nose, and as piercing as the eyes of a hawk were his eyes of steely blue. Altogether, he seemed a man to be reckoned with.

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"Well, Bill," addressed the general, buoyantly, "I didn't mean to desert you fellows, but I needed exercise."

"I see," nodded Bill, gravely. His keen, steely eyes noted the buffalo tongue; they read every detail of Ned's face and figure; and swiftly sweeping the horizon they returned to him.

"Killed a big bull and found a small boy," continued the general. "Ned, this gentleman is Mr. James B. Hickok, better known as Wild Bill. He's a valuable friend to have."

Mr. Hickok reined forward his horse, and offered Ned his hand.

"How do you do?" he spoke, politely. His voice was soft, but vibrant, and Ned liked him. "Count me at your service."

Ned was certain that Mr. Hickok was not making fun of him; and, abashed, he shook hands. Whereupon Mr. Hickok gracefully reined his horse back to the general.

All the soldiers had arrived. "By their blanket-rolls and haversacks, they must be on a scout," thought Ned, "and not merely on a hunt." Among the last to arrive was another young officer—a captain, said the double bars of his shoulder-straps.

"All right, Hamilton. Now that you've shown us you're safe, we'll go on," called the general, still in joking frame of mind. That he had distanced all

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his company and had an adventure pleased him immensely.

With quick gesture he waved his hand, and accompanied by Mr. Hickok trotted to the fore. Captain Hamilton escorted at one side of the column, as two by two the soldiery strung out. Behind the general rode the lance-corporal, and Bugler Odell, Ned holding tightly to him. Now and then Bugler Odell let information drift over Ned's shoulder.

"That be Wild Bill," he said, speaking guardedly. "'Tis the name he likes best. He's chief scout for the general, and peace-keeper all 'round, for he's boss o' Riley, I tell ye. Six-foot two he stands in his socks; ye can span his waist with your hands. Quickest shot with the pistol I ever saw; chain lightnin' can't beat him. But you wouldn't think he was such a tarrer, to speak with him. And when he's mad he doesn't talk much louder or say much more; yet you bet wan word and wan look from him be plinty to make the worst badman on the trail calm down and say, 'Certainly, Bill. Excuse me, Mr. Hickok.' He served in the Kansas troubles before the War, when the free-soil men and the slavery men were makin' the border a red-hot place. He was a Union scout out here durin' the War, too, and fought at the battle o' Pea Ridge down in Arkansas. Wan time, in Sixty-wan, alone in a room he was attacked by ten border-ruffians, hand to hand, and when it was over they were all dead and he

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was 'most dead with eleven buckshot in him and thirteen other wounds."

"Is he a soldier now?" queried Ned, awed.

"Nope; not what you might call a reg'lar soldier. He's a border-man—a frontiersman. Some might call him a desperado, behind his back; and some a gambler; but anyway, he's got the bravery and the nerve, and his word is good as gold, and that's the kind o' men needed out in this country."

They rode on, while Ned pondered over the character of the terrible Wild Bill Hickok. He had appeared as such a mildly speaking, gentlemanly individual, that Bugler Odell's description did not seem to fit.

"The Sivinth Cavalry be gettin' its share o' good men," resumed Bugler Odell, confidentially. "Yon captain—he's a foine wan, and a great joker. Captain Hamilton, I mean. Sure, he's a lieutenant-colonel, from the War; but he ranks as captain o' Reg'lars, by appointment to the Sivinth. His grandfather was a big man by the name o' Alexander Hamilton. Ah, the Sivinth be officered entirely by generals and colonels and majors; and titles be so thick they make your head swim. I'm only plain sergeant, but some o' the enlisted men be generals, by courtesy, as ye'll find out."

"Right you are," agreed the lance-corporal. "The War left many a man with soldierin' as his only job."

Wild Bill was an accurate scout, for as the sun was

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setting they all sighted directly ahead, high upon a table-land backed by hills, an irregular group of buildings, the windows flashing above the level dun expanse below. Between were trees, marking a stream.

"There's Riley," announced Bugler Odell, pointing. "Below is the Smoky Hill Fork o' the Republican, and the line o' cottonwoods runnin' to north'ard be the Republican itself. The post sits in the elbow o' the two, where they join and make the Kaw or Kansas."

As they approached Ned gazed curiously. The post made quite a showing, and everybody in the column seemed glad to be getting back. Now the flag-staff of the post, with the colors still floating, showed clearly. The general stirred restlessly in his saddle, as if eager to shorten the distance. The dogs, which had been ranging far and wide, galloped further ahead, and further, anon halting to look hopefully behind them and see that the column were surely coming on.

Suddenly across the rosy-purple glow making lovely the flat landscape, wafted high and sweet the notes of a bugle at the post. All the column listened—or appeared to listen.

"'Tis retreat; boom goes the avenin' gun and down comes the flag," explained Bugler Odell, as if Ned did not know.

But Ned did know, and he nodded to himself; for this was one of the army calls taught him by his father.

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The long notes died amidst a dull "Boom!" by the evening gun; and Ned saw the flag slide down the tall pole.

"Faith, we'll be locked out," chuckled Odell, as a joke. "The general won't like that; he's wantin' to be home with his wife."

"Sound the trot," bade the general, curtly, without turning head.

Bugler Odell did so; and through the clattering column rang the brisk voice of young Captain Hamilton: "Trot—march!" Away they trotted, all, canteens jingling, carbines jolting, saddles creaking, horses grunting. Close before was the sparse timber of the Republican River, flowing from the north; this river they evidently must cross, as the post was upon the other side.

"Give them Garryowen, Hamilton," called the general. And he added, aside: "Then they'll have supper hot."

Captain Hamilton nodded at Bugler Odell; and now as the column was splashing into the ford Odell blew a lively lilt. It was one of the merriest, most stirring tunes that Ned ever had heard, and he resolved to learn it. It put life into the whole column.

"That's a new wan to ye, I'll wager," remarked Odell, having paused as for breath. "'Tis an Irish song that the general likes, and it's the march o' the Sivinth Cavalry."

The post was above the opposite bank. It stood

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forth clear in the crisp air, and among the buildings Ned could see figures scurrying to and fro. Some of them were women. Away sped the dogs, floundering through the shallows, and scrambling up the ascent, racing for supper. Next out scrambled the horses, climbing the steep, beaten trail that led from the river-bed to the flat plateau above; and at trot the returning column soon rode into the army post of old Fort Riley.

Bleak it was; composed of bare but substantial barracks and officers' quarters, two stories high, of whitish stone laid in plaster. These buildings, lined with verandas, faced inward, forming a broken square. Outside the square were several other buildings, of stone and boards—being, as Ned was soon told, the store-houses and stables.

As soon as the column halted, the general nimbly dismounted, and leaving his horse for his orderly and the dismissal of the column for Captain Hamilton, he made straight for two women who were standing expectantly awaiting him, and overwhelmed by the barking dogs.

One he kissed gladly, while to the other he gave his free hand.

"Here we are, Libbie," Ned heard him say. "Ready for Lizzie's best. I've brought her a buffalo tongue—a big one. And a recruit, too." With his arm about the woman's shoulders he beckoned to Ned. "Oh, Ned! Come here."

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Ned went slowly forward. He was ashamed of his rags.

The woman whom the general was treating so affectionately was small and dark-eyed and sweet; the other woman was a pretty girl, plump and roguish and very curly-headed, with a profusion of dancing golden hair. She was smiling across at Captain Hamilton, who now had dismissed the column.

"Ned, one of these ladies is my wife Mrs. Custer, and the other is our guest, Miss Diana," informed the general, a twinkle in his blue eyes. "You can guess which is which. I picked Ned up on the prairie, at the same time I got the buffalo—and when the buffalo was about to get *him*," he explained, to the twain. "He wants to be a soldier, and I think we'll make a bugler of him. What do *you* think?"

"Oh, you poor boy!" exclaimed the dark-eyed little woman, holding to Ned both her hands, while Miss Diana smiled brightly upon him. "Is he lost, Autie?"

"Same old story," answered the general, soberly. "A waif from another Indian raid. I'll tell you about it. But he'll stay with us, and we're going to find his sister for him. She's all that's left—somewhere out among the tribes."

"Oh!" gasped both women.

"He can come right along with us, can't he?" queried Mrs. Custer. "He must be hungry and he ought to have some clothes."

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“N-no, he’d better stay with Odell,” decided the general. “I’ll have the quartermaster outfit him. He must mess with the other men. He’s to be enlisted as a bugler.”

Old Fort Riley proved a bustling place. It had been located in the fall of 1852, and rebuilt in 1855 to afford protection to the settlers who were passing westward up along the Kansas River Valley. Before it was christened in honor of General Bennet C. Riley it had been called Camp Center, because it was supposed to be the geographical center of the United States. Now it was rapidly filling up with the recruits for the new Seventh United States Cavalry. Many other people also were flocking through by ox-team, mule and horse. The rails of the westward creeping Kansas Pacific branch of the Union Pacific Railroad had approached, to continue on and on, to Denver.

The post was upon a broad table-land high above the rivers, without a tree or a shrub, where the wind always blew. The Republican River, flowing down from the northward, and the Smoky Hill, flowing in from the westward, joined currents; and below the fort rolled eastward the noble Kansas River, in a beautiful valley dotted with settlers’ farms and threaded by the new Kansas Pacific Railroad. Westward from the fort could be seen other farms, along the Smoky Hill, and the town of Junction City.

Despite the bareness and the windiness (which were nothing strange to Ned, who had lived on the

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Colorado plains) Fort Riley had its charms. The air was fresh, the view was wide, and with the many soldiers and the frequent arrivals by stage and by horse or wagon, things were constantly happening.

In fact, wherever the general chanced to be, something was bound to happen. He made matters lively—especially when he was off duty. He and Mrs. Custer were great chums; and, next to her, he liked horses and dogs—but which the better, it was hard to say. He had a complete pack of dogs: fox hounds (the old one called Rover) from Texas, where he had been stationed after the war; a pair of deer-hounds, one of whom was named Byron; Fannie a fox terrier; stag-hound puppies, Maida and Blucher; and a bow-legged white bull-dog named Turk, who was the deadly rival of Byron. He had three horses, splendid ones, named for army friends; Jack Rucker was a thoroughbred mare from Texas; Phil Sheridan was a blooded colt from Virginia; and Custis Lee, a pacing horse, very fast, was ridden usually by Mrs. Custer.

The post headquarters, where lived the general and family, was the best of the double two-story stone houses about the parade-ground. It frequently echoed with song and laughter and merry cries, and the general's hunting-horn. The household was composed of the general and Mrs. Custer, Lizzie the faithful black cook, who had been with the general in the South through the War, and a little negro boy who

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wanted to be a jockey. Then of course there were the dogs. In the other half of the house lived Major Alfred Gibbs and family. Major Gibbs was a portly, carefully-dressed man, who had been a soldier since 1846. He ranked next to General Custer.

In his house the general was the same rollicking, active spirit that he was when a horse; on duty at the post or afield, and mingling with the soldiers, he acted the strict officer. He might joke with the other officers, but all the men understood that he was the chief, and that he would brook no intrusion upon his military dignity. Thus, although they called him (out of his hearing) the "old man," and "old Jack" (because of the initials G. A. C., for George Armstrong Custer, on his baggage), they saluted promptly, and obeyed instantly, and tried no jokes on *him*!

Through the long winter officers, recruits and horses were arriving almost daily at Fort Riley, to bring up the Seventh Cavalry roll. Ned grew to know them all. The yellow-haired, boyish General Custer remained in command; for although he ranked as lieutenant-colonel, his superior officer of the regiment, Colonel Andrew Jackson Smith, a major-general and a veteran, who dated back to 1838, was kept on duty elsewhere. Therefore "old Jack" held the reins at the post—and the soldiers were speedily brought to know it.

Of the younger officers Ned liked especially his Captain, Louis M. Hamilton—who was also a lieu-

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tenant-colonel; First Lieutenant Tom Custer, the general's light-hearted younger brother, a lieutenant-colonel who had enlisted in the war at sixteen and wore two medals for enemy's flags captured; Captain Myles Keogh, who had served the Pope as well as in the Army of the Potomac; Lieutenant Myles Moylan the adjutant; and the young second lieutenants who were called "shave-tails" and "tad-poles" and "plebes."

Wild Bill, the frontiersman scout, was at the post frequently, passing up and down, by horse or stage, along the trail west. He was as particular in his dress as was old Major Gibbs; everything that he wore was of the finest material, from the ruffle-pleated soft white shirt and broad-cloth in Junction City to the blue flannel shirt and riding-breeches on the trail. No matter how dressed, he was always the same quiet, courteous personage—but he never was seen without the two ivory-handled revolvers ready at his hips. Report said that he could shoot to the centre without sighting; and could shoot backward over his shoulder or under his arm, with an equal deadliness.

All the winter the soldiers were steadily drilled, and put under constant discipline. "Whipped into shape," said Bugler Odell. Some men complained, and some deserted; but the better men realized that the strict training was necessary.

Bugles were ringing from early till late. Two buglers were attached to each company. Ned found himself assigned to the company of Captain Hamilton,

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and he was glad of that. Now he wore the bugler's uniform, which had narrow double strips of yellow down the trousers, and yellow braid across the chest. It really was a uniform equal to that of any officer; but——

“All stripes and no authority,” with a laugh declared Odell, who was chief bugler. “That's what they say o' the trumpeter.”

The winter passed without any Indian fights, but with the Seventh Cavalry getting ready. The railroad trains arrived, and excursionists were more plentiful than ever: some wanted to hunt buffalo and some wanted to see Indians, and some wanted to look for land. Rumors reported that the Cheyennes and the Sioux and the Arapahos to the westward were not keeping their promises; and that this spring they would oppose the further advance of the railroad through their hunting grounds. The settlers of western Kansas were becoming alarmed again. The Seventh Cavalry must protect them, and the Smoky Hill stage and emigrant route to Denver, and the railroad survey.

Soon was it known that as quick as the spring opened the Seventh Cavalry would take the field. By this time Ned, under the teaching of Chief Bugler Odell, was a thorough trumpeter. Reveille, sick call, mess call, stables, boots and saddles, the assembly, drill, fire, trot, charge, tattoo, taps—he knew them all.

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He had learned "The Girl I Left Behind Me"; and he had learned "Garryowen"—

"Our hearts so stout have got us fame,
For soon 'tis known from whence we came,
Where'er we go they dread the name
Of Garryowen in glory."

That inspiring tune to which had charged the Custer Third Brigade in the War, and which was now adopted by the Seventh Cavalry.

So, having been by Odell pronounced a "credit to the regiment," Ned felt himself a soldier and ready with the other soldiers.

III

THE SEVENTH TAKES THE FIELD

"It's like this," said Odell, after mess. "We're bound to go. Those 'Rapahos and Cheyennes and Kiowas and 'Paches and Sioux out yon are ready to act mean again, and the army'll have to calm 'em down. By their treaty o' Sixty-foive didn't they promise to keep away from the overland trails, and not camp by day or by night within ten miles o' any of 'em, or visit any white settlement without permission beforehand? And what did they do? Only last summer they went on their murtherin' raids, time after time, and the treaty not a year old yet. Didn't they kill and rob right and lift through the settlements o' the Saline and the Solomon, jist west o' here, drivin' the farmers out? And haven't they been botherin' the stage road up along the Smoky, and the southwest travel by the Santy Fee Trail, and threatenin' the railroad advance?"

"They blame it on old Cut Nose and Pawnee Killer's band of Dog Soldiers," spoke somebody. "Those Dog Soldiers weren't there to sign the treaty, and they say they aren't bound by it."

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“Who are those Dog Soldiers, except the worst rascals out of all the tribes?” grunted Sergeant Henderson, who had fought Indians before the Sixties. “I know ’em.”

“Well, this country belonged to the Indians, first, didn’t it?” pursued a recruit. “We’re crossing it without asking ‘by your leave,’ and we’re settling in the midst of it and taking all we can get. I hear buffalo are scarcer than they used to be, too, since the whites opened up the country. That’s what the Indians depend on for a living—the buffalo.”

“Ah, now, mebbe you’re right, and I think myself the Injuns are treated a bit shabbily, at times,” responded Odell. “There are rascals on both sides. But what would ye do? Save back all this western country jist for the Injun to hunt on? Wan Injun needs about ten square mile o’ territory, and he laves it the same as he found it. The white man takes a half square mile—yes, and much less—and he stays with it and improves it; and twinty white men and their families can live in the space required by wan Injun jist for huntin’ whilst the women do the work.”

“As long as there’s a trail unfenced, when the grass greens in the spring and the willow and cottonwood buds swell, the Injun—and specially the young Injun—will grow uneasy,” quoth Sergeant Henderson. “Spring is war time, summer is visiting time, fall is hunt time. In winter the Injuns are glad to have the Government take care of ’em. We’re pushing

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two railroads through, whites are getting thicker, Injuns are being bossed by the Government and cheated by traders and crowded by settlers, and they see nothin' for 'em but to clean the country out—if they can."

Wild Bill had ridden at canter into the parade ground, and across to headquarters. At the veranda of the general's house he pulled short, and swung to ground, as if he had been sent for. Then he entered.

When he came out, presently, he was riding away in a great hurry, when the sergeant hailed him, passing.

"What's the news, Bill?"

"Sharpen your sabres," spoke Wild Bill, briefly, without drawing rein.

He rode on, and turned into the stage road which led west, up the Smoky Hill River. Evidently he was carrying dispatches to Forts Harker and Hays, the new Seventh Cavalry posts that were guarding the further advance of the Kansas Pacific.

Wild Bill had spoken to the point, as always. He wasted no words. Before the afternoon drill, there had spread through the post like wildfire the word that the Seventh Cavalry must be prepared to take the field, equipped for service, within a fortnight.

This was great news. Old Fort Riley seethed with it. Now in these the days of early March there was a sudden increase of mounted drills long and hard; an effort at target practice with the stubby Spencer repeating carbines—proving that most of the men shot

THE SEVENTH TAKES THE FIELD

no better than they rode; shoeing of horses and tinkering of wagons at the fort smithy; and grinding of sabers on the post grind-stones.

Passing a grind-stone Ned noticed private Malloy busily engaged in applying the edge of an unusually long sabre. Malloy was the "striker" or officer's handy-man on duty at the general's house. He looked up at Ned, and, wiping the perspiration from his brow, grinned. So did the soldier who was turning for him.

"Do you recognize the big toad-sticker?" queried Malloy.

Ned doubtfully shook his head. Malloy obligingly handed it to him.

"Look at it an' heft it. It's the general's. Thought mebbe you'd seen it hanging on his wall. 'Tis one captured in the War; an' the noise of the grinding sort o' reminded him he wanted it whetted up. 'Malloy,' said he, 'polish that big scalping knife o' mine along with the rest of 'em.'"

"Can you swing it?" bantered the other soldier.

Ned lifted the sabre and examined it. It was as long as he was tall; was far longer and heavier than regulation. On the bright blade were letters engraved:

Do not draw me without cause;
Do not sheathe me without honor.

What a sword! No, Ned could not swing it. He handed it back,

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"That's a real Damascus steel, they say," informed Malloy's helper.

"Is the general going to take it on the march?" asked Ned, expectantly.

"No, I reckon not," answered Malloy; "but he would if he wanted to, I'll wager—just as he wears his hair long an' his tie red. He's a great man for having his own way, is old Jack."

"Headstrong, you might call him," added the other man. "Like chasin' a buffalo, alone and 'way off from his command, an' not knowin' but that Injuns are right over the next ridge."

The yellow hair and quick voice of the general were everywhere, as with prompt eyes and mind he oversaw the post preparations. For now was it known that this was to be an important march, wherever it led; with infantry and artillery as well as cavalry, and with Major-General Winfield Scott Hancock himself accompanying. The purpose, it seemed, was to have a talk with the Indians, and to show them that the United States was ready with soldiers to protect the white people on the plains.

General Hancock was the commander of the Military Department of the Missouri. His headquarters were Fort Leavenworth, on the Missouri River at the eastern border of Kansas. From Fort Leavenworth were coming the artillery and most of the infantry. In all there would be about 1400 men, thought Odell.

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The expedition gave to Fort Riley a war-like appearance. First the scouts began to collect. Wild Bill was there anyway; and came in, among others, a young scout named Cody—Bill Cody. He had been at Riley, off and on, before. With his flowing dark hair, his wide black eyes, his silky moustache and goatee and his buckskins and weapons, he looked indeed entitled to considerable respect.

“Do you know that man?” had asked Odell, of Ned.

“No.”

“He’s a good wan. He’s Pony Express Bill. That’s what they used to call him. Was the youngest pony express rider on the line. Faith, he rode when he wasn’t any older than you, my lad, carryin’ the mail across the plains. Now he ranks up with Wild Bill and the rist o’ the scouts. And they do say he’s the best buffalo hunter, white or red, west o’ Leavenworth.”

There also was a squat little Mexican, swart and pock-marked and very homely, whom everybody styled Romeo because his name was Romero. And at the last sauntered in a big-nosed bluish-eyed man, with much brick-red hair and whiskers mingling, whose title was California Joe.

California Joe never was seen without his greasy black slouch hat on his abundant hair, and his short, black briar pipe between his whiskered lips. Baggy trousers were tucked deep into dusty boots, and a

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venerable cavalry overcoat was draped over several layers of other garments. He rode a large mule, which he declared beat a horse "all hollow." As he lounged about, he was ready to talk to anybody. By his numerous quaint remarks he plainly was an odd character.

The arrival of the troops from Fort Leavenworth brought a squad of Delaware Indians, as more scouts. They were from their reservation near to Fort Leavenworth. The chief was Fall Leaf, a well-built, fierce-looking old man, war chief of the Delaware tribe, and a great fighter. Of the train he grunted: "Heap good! Went whiz! Beat buffalo and pony." Of the telegraph he said: "No understand, but heap good. Heap swift! Like arrow or bullet between wide places; but heap better." His nephew General Jackson was another member of the squad. General Jackson was slender and small, but brave.

The troops who arrived by train from Fort Leavenworth were one battery of light artillery, and six companies of the Thirty-seventh Infantry, with a company of engineers, for laying bridges. They pitched their tents outside the post.

At the same time arrived also General Winfield Scott Hancock and his staff, including General Smith. General Hancock was the department commander in the field; but General Smith, as colonel of the Seventh Cavalry, commanded the march. A round-faced, heavy moustached, energetic man proved to be General

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Smith, who would fall to and do things himself in order to have them done right. He had made a great reputation in the late war.

All of the officers were glad to shake hands with General Custer, the youngest of the whole bevy except a few "tads" fresh from the Academy or just appointed from the civil life.

But among the most interesting of the new-comers was a little Indian boy who had been captured from the Cheyennes when, on Sand Creek, at Thanksgiving time, 1864, the Colorado volunteers attacked Black Kettle's village of Cheyennes and Arapahos and shattered it. The Cheyennes and Arapahos claimed that the attack had been a massacre; and they had demanded that the whites return the little boy and his sister to them. Now General Hancock had brought the little boy along, to return him and thus show the Indians that the heart of the Great White Father at Washington was good toward them. The little boy had been taken care of in the East and spoke English, and except for his color was like any white boy.

"Sure, 'tis foolishness," declared Odell, at mess. "The Injuns will only think the Government be afraid of 'em, and they'll take the lad and do nothin' in return. What of all the white captives they hold? What o' Ned's sister? Do ye see 'em returnin' her?"

"Well, but wasn't that Sand Creek fight a big mistake on the part of the soldiers?" asked the talkative recruit—who had been a lawyer before he en-

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listed. "As I understand, the charge was made on a friendly village that had hoisted the United States flag for protection."

"This whole Indian question is a problem, anyhow," quoth Odell. "If you treat 'em as you'd treat white men, they don't understand, because they live by different rules. And if you treat 'em as red men, and fight fire with fire, then you have to do things that a white man ought not to do. At Sand Creek the white men took revenge jist as red men take revenge; and while it wasn't exactly a civilized way to foight, nivertheless it gave the settlers peace for a time, b' gorry."

Hearing this discussion gave Ned a great thought. What if General Custer would have the little Indian boy traded for Ned's sister? What if! Perhaps that was the plan. But before he ventured to ask the general, he found out.

General Hancock was a fine large, very military man, with grayish mustache and short goatee; and he looked and acted as if he were indeed the one to behave so gallantly, as he did, in the Mexican War and at the battle of Chancellorsville in the Civil War. Ned had paused, to watch him and General Custer walking briskly and talking together, as they crossed the parade-ground. General Custer suddenly caught sight of Ned, standing, and with impulsive gesture waved him forward.

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Ned squared his shoulders, in military step paced over, and intercepting the two officers put his heels together, pulled in his chin and his stomach, and saluted. They acknowledged the salute—General Hancock eyeing him keenly. Ned was glad to feel that he was neat and soldierly. So he waited.

“This is the lad whose sister is held by the Cheyennes,” was saying General Custer, “and concerning whom I addressed you the communication suggesting that the Government trade the Cheyenne boy for her.”

“I see,” replied General Hancock. “The War Department, as I was obliged to inform you, decided that such a course was unwise considering that the treaty agreement to return the boy was made without any proviso of such a nature. I’m sorry, my lad,” he proffered to Ned. “But we’ll try to get back your sister, just as soon as we can.”

Ned’s heart had leaped, only to fall again. He could not speak. General Custer must have read his disappointment, for he said, quickly:

“I understand you can blow the bugle pretty well now, boy.”

“Yes, sir. I think so, sir.”

“Know all the calls; every one?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And Garryowen?” The Custer blue eyes danced.

“Yes, sir.”

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“Well,” continued General Custer, “you may report at post headquarters as headquarters bugler. But I require a *good* one. Remember that.”

“Yes, sir. I will, sir,” stammered Ned. His heart again thumped, his joy choked him, he knew that he was like a beet.

A bugler, selected in turn from the company buglers, always was on duty at headquarters as the orderly bugler; but Ned had been omitted, until he knew the calls perfectly. Now at last he was chosen; he was entitled to take his bedding to the orderly's room at the headquarters building; he would stay there and sleep there, and would be near the general constantly, to blow calls for the post and to go on errands wherever the general or the adjutant might send him—or where Mrs. Custer, either, might want to send him. Some of the buglers liked this duty; some didn't, though all liked a chance at the kitchen and Eliza's cooking! But for Ned it wasn't the cooking, especially: it was being there with General Custer.

Another company of the Thirty-seventh Infantry arrived, and also several companies of the Thirty-eighth Infantry, a colored regiment. They were a strange variety of soldiers; many of them right from plantations down south, and not yet disciplined to army life. They were to garrison the post while the Seventh Cavalry was absent!

Now at the close of March the expedition was ready to start. Cartridge boxes and belts were full,

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clothing repaired, horses shod, and according to the cavalry the infantrymen (who were called "dough-boys") all had their shoes resoled. Ned well knew that the general was outfitted better than anybody; for at headquarters he had seen Mrs. Custer flying busily about the house, gathering things to stow in the stout blue mess-chest bearing the letters "G. A. C., 7th Cav., U. S. A."

In the little room which was his as orderly bugler or trumpeter Ned awoke early, full of eagerness. This was the day of the start, and he must do the starting. According to the trumpeter orders, written by the adjutant and tacked on the wall, and to the clock, "First Call" was not due for twenty minutes. So he must wait, until at the exact second he issued forth into the pink dawn, before the office, as it was called. Standing erect and soldierly at the foot of the steps, facing in all directions, he blew on his battered brass bugle from the quartermaster's supplies the warning "First Call."

In due time the company buglers began to gather, around the flag-pole; until as the sun rose it was time for the reveille. At word from the sergeant of the guard (who yawned) all put bugles to lips and sounded the initial note. "Boom!" belched the morning gun; up to the top of the pole sped the flag, floating out gloriously; and through the bright morning air pealed, from the buglers beneath it, the rollicking reveille:

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I can't get 'em up, I can't get 'em up, I can't get 'em up this morning,
I can't get 'em up, I can't get 'em up, I can't get 'em up at all;
The corp'ral's worse than the private, the sergeant's worse than the corp'ral,
The lieutenant's worse than the sergeant, and the captain's worse than them all.

At the same moment, from the infantry and artillery camp also pealed its reveille.

There was a brief pause; and next must be sounded the "Assembly." Out from the barracks poured the men, buttoning coats and clapping on caps, to form their companies. The sergeants called the roll, and reported on the "present, absent, or accounted for."

Smokes were wafting upward from the chimneys of company cooks, and of wives and servants in officers' row, and soon Ned, now alone, from the parade-ground must sound "Mess":

Soup-y, soup-y, soup-y, not a single bean;
Coff-ee, coff-ee, coff-ee, and not a bit of cream;
Pork-y, pork-y, porky, and not a blamed streak o' lean!

So, too, he sounded "Stables":

Come off to the stable all ye who are able,
And give your horses some oats and some corn;
For if you don't do it your colonel will know it,
And then you will rue it, as sure as you're born.

And "Sick Call":

Go get your pills, go get your pills;
Go get your pills, go get your pills;
Go get your pills, go get your pills;
Go get your pi-lls. Go get your pills.

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However, there were few sick men, on this day when the Seventh Cavalry was to march.

The remainder of the garrison calls, such as guard-mount and fatigue, were assigned to the colored infantry bugler, for the infantry now succeeded to the routine at old Fort Riley. The cavalry had something better.

While on an errand to the general's house, Ned heard the preparations there. Before the steps of the veranda stood the General's horse Phil Sheridan. Within, the general was saying goodby to Mrs. Custer. Ned could hear him assuring the "old lady" (which was Mrs. Custer's pet title, aside from Libbie) that it was to be a short campaign; that the Indians would be afraid to make trouble, and that he would be back very soon.

"Sho' he will, Miss Libbie; he'll be back 'foh we know it," comforted Eliza. "Anyway, this campaignin' on the plains ain't wuss'n campaignin' in Virginny. You know that, don't you?"

Out came the general, clanking in his spurs and sabre. Not now was he wearing his buckskin coat; he was clad in the full fatigue uniform of a lieutenant-colonel of cavalry. He still wore his black slouch hat, with gold cord and tassel. His dogs raced before him, overjoyed at the prospect of a gallop. Evidently they were to go.

From headquarters issued 'Adjutant Moylan, ready to mount. Equipped with his own sabre and

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revolver, like any trumpeter, Ned stiffened to attention.

"Sound boots and saddles," ordered the adjutant.

Ned put to his lips his bugle, and blew loud and clear the spirited bar of "Boots and Saddles." Hither and thither scurried the soldiers, for the stables, to saddle and bridle; and it looked as if some of them had already done so. The teamsters clapped the final harness on their mules and led them at a trot for the traces.

General Custer, blue-eyed, golden-locked, bronze-faced, slender but wiry, stood on the veranda of his house, tugging at his gauntlets as he watched the bustle. Mrs. Custer stole out, with the pretty Diana (suspiciously red-eyed, Ned imagined) and pressed beside him. He placed his arm about her. From the door behind peered the black face, turbaned with a red bandanna, of Eliza.

"To horse," bade the adjutant, of Ned.

Ned sounded "To Horse." Out from the stables jostled the troopers, leading their horses to form the company lines.

The general stooped hastily and kissed Mrs. Custer. Down the steps he clanked, his slouch hat at a cavalier angle, his officer's cloak, yellow lined, floating and beneath it showing his crimson tie. He took the reins from the negro boy and vaulted upon Phil Sheridan.

Adjutant Moylan mounted, and Ned swung

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aboard his special horse Buckie, at a trot to follow across the parade-ground.

The companies were formed and waiting, each man at the head of his horse. The infantry drums and bugles also had been sounding; all the tents had been struck, and the lines of blue and white were standing at a carry, in a "right dress."

"Prepare to mount!" shouted General Custer, drawing sabre.

"Prepare to mount!" repeated the company commanders.

Every trooper turned, put left boot into stirrup, and hand upon mane and saddle, waited.

"Mount!"

With one motion the blue blouses upheaved, and were in the saddle. A few horses plunged, but they were held in line. The wagon teamsters were in their seats, their lines taut, their whips poised. On the steps or porches of all the officers' quarters women were waving and trying to smile (and some were succeeding and some were not); outside the post could be heard the commands of the infantry and artillery officers.

"Sound the advance," bade the general, curtly.

As Ned did so, he was answered by the bugles of the infantry, in similar call.

"Fours right—march!" The new band rode bravely to the front. Whirling his horse, the general,

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followed by his bugler, trotted briskly to take the lead. All the companies, forming fours, fell in one behind another, the swallow-tail cavalry guidons of white and red fluttering gaily in the breeze.

The new band blared in a tune. No "Garryowen" this time, but "The Girl I Left Behind Me."

The hour was sad I left the maid,
A ling'ring farewell taking;
Her sighs and tears my steps delayed—
I thought her heart was breaking.
In hurried words her name I blessed,
I breathed the vows that bind me,
And to my heart in anguish pressed
The girl I left behind me.

Then to the east we bore away,
To win a name in story,
And there, where dawns the sun of day,
There dawned our sun of glory;
Both blazed in noon on Alna's height,
When in the post assigned me
I shared the glory of that fight,
Sweet girl I left behind me.

Full many a name our banners bore—

It was a tune as inspiring as "Yankee Doodle," but sweeter.

The expedition made a great sight. First rode a squad of the picked scouts—Delawares and white men—headed by Wild Bill clad in showy fringed buckskins. Scout "Pony Bill" Cody did not ac-

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company. He was reserved to guide another detachment to Fort Hays.

After the line of scouts came the commanding officers and their staffs. General Hancock was only representing the department, to talk with the Indians, but he frequently dashed up and down the march, inspecting. He and General Smith made an active pair, prompt to criticize.

The infantry, long Springfield rifles at a slant over shoulder, canteens clinking at hips, with the artillery and the pontoon train rumbling behind, formed one column. A detachment of recruits from Fort Leavenworth, to be distributed among the Southwest posts, had joined only just in time. They were under young Lieutenant John A. Hannay of the Third Infantry.

The Seventh Cavalry, following their band, formed the other column. General Custer and his adjutant, Lieutenant Moylan, led; and close behind the general rode Ned, the orderly bugler. Behind Ned was the color guard—Sergeant Kennedy with the great silken Stars and Stripes, another sergeant with the broad blue, yellow-fringed standard of the Seventh Cavalry, and the two guards who completed the four.

The general staff, and the cavalry officers of course, and the artillery officers and most of the infantry officers were horseback; save old Major Gibbs, who was fleshy, and who had been badly

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wounded years before in an Indian fight. He rode in the ambulance. Young Lieutenant Hannay, with his recruits, must walk.

Glancing back from his saddle Ned thrilled in his heart as he saw the long blue columns, with flags large and small floating over, and the wagon train, the white hoods drawn each by six mules, filing after.

The cavalry seemed the least showy, for all the troopers were so loaded down with blanket rolls, and frying pan and tin cup, and canteen, and haversack stuffed with hardtack, and seven-shot carbine, and saber, and studded cartridge belt with butcher-knife thrust through it, and revolver holsters, and lariat and picket pin slung to saddle, that really the riders looked like traveling peddlers!

As for the other column—Odell and Sergeant Kennedy and such veteran cavalrymen had laughed among themselves, when they heard that Indians were to be chased with artillery and a pontoon train.

IV.

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SAVE for the Custer dogs, who were constantly chasing rabbits and wolves, with now and then an antelope, the march west was not exciting. After a time signs of the railroad ceased, and there were only the stage stations, with occasional ranches, and with one or two settlements.

Ninety miles along the Smoky Hill route was another Seventh Cavalry post, Fort Harker, formerly named Fort Ellsworth. This was not much of a fort, being composed of just a few bare, sod-roofed log cabins, bravely floating the Stars and Stripes. Still further west were Fort Hays and Fort Wallace or Pond Creek. However, increased at Fort Harker by two more troops of the Seventh, the expedition turned off south for Fort Larned, seventy miles across country, down by the Arkansas River and the old Santa Fé Trail into New Mexico. A wagon road branched off for it, from Harker.

At Fort Harker the expedition was met by a tall, bearded, soldierly man who, Ned speedily heard as the word traveled through the column, was Colonel Jesse H. Leavenworth, son of the older army man for

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whom Fort Leavenworth was named, and formerly an army officer himself.

"He served out on the Colorado plains during the war," at noon halt explained Sergeant Kennedy—whom Ned much liked. "Commanded the Rocky Mountain Rangers. A fine officer, they say. Now he's the agent for the Comanches and Kiowas, down at Larned. There's another army man and agent, too, at the same place: Major Wyncoop. His Injuns are Arapahos, Cheyennes and 'Paches. Each agent blames t'other one for damage done."

"How big is Fort Larned?" queried Ned.

"Well, Larned's a fair post, but nothing like Riley, in size. Lots of Injuns come in there, for their supplies and to trade buffalo-robcs. Stages and emigrants stop there, too."

The weather continued mild and pleasant, and the march might have seemed only a practice march, had it not been for the scouts now riding more widely in front and on the flanks, examining the landscape. By this might it be known that the real Indian country had been reached.

However, no Indians at all came near the march. They still were in their winter villages, awaiting the signal of the bursting willow buds and the greening grass. On duty regularly at headquarters tent, Ned could not help but hear most of the conversation; and he heard Colonel Leavenworth talking with General Custer.

"My Indians are mostly camped down south, on

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the Texas border," was explaining Colonel Leavenworth. "It will be hard to get them up this far, until they draw their rations. Satanta is coming, though, to tell you what he thinks."

"The red rascal," accused General Custer, roundly.

"N-no, he's a smart Injun. He's quite a man, Custer," declared the colonel. "I can count on Satanta, and he's the chief of the Kiowas. The Injuns you fellows want to look close after are that crowd of Wyncoop's. I understand Wyncoop has sent out word for them to come in to Larned and meet you in a council."

"Well, we'll hear what old Satanta has to say, and what the others have to say; but Hancock is out to make it plain that *we* have something to say, too," answered General Custer. "We'll smoke the peace-pipe—and if they want war we can give it to them in any shape, by horse, foot and artillery. That's my understanding of the situation and I'm ready to turn my Seventh Cavalry loose, if necessary. After a winter of drill and discipline they're in fair shape. They need only one fight, shoulder to shoulder, to make a real regiment of them."

The terraced plateaus bordering the Smoky Hill Fork had been left behind; the flatly rolling plains grew sandier and sandier; and, finally, four days out of Fort Harker, on the seventh of April was sighted again a garrison flag streaming red, white and blue in the prairie wind.

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Here, then, where the Pawnee Fork River from the West emptied into the Great Bend of the Arkansas, was Fort Larned, guarding its section of southwestern Kansas, and the Santa Fé Trail travel to Colorado and New Mexico. Rather similar to Riley was Fort Larned, being constructed partly of stone. It was the agency for the Arapahos and Cheyennes and a few Apaches, who hunted north of it, and for the Kiowas and Comanches, who hunted south of it. Hither the Indians brought in thousands of buffalo robes, to trade for sugar, coffee and cloth and trinkets.

It might be expected that camped about Fort Larned would be Indians; but there was not one tipi in sight, except a few rude tents sheltering some half-breeds or squaw-men as they were called—traders and hangers-on. It was reported that up the Pawnee Fork about thirty miles was a winter village under Chief Pawnee Killer of the Sioux and Chief White Horse of the Cheyennes, but the march was not continued here. When the troops went into noon camp outside the post, General Hancock and his staff were met by Agent Wyncoop, of the Arapahos, Cheyennes and Apaches.

“The tribes of my agency are peacefully inclined,” proclaimed Major Wyncoop, hotly. Whereas Colonel Leavenworth, standing near, smiled. “They rarely have committed any offences against the laws, and they have been charged with crimes perpetrated by

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other tribes. They have suffered heavily because of the Kiowas in particular, who are the most turbulent Indians on the plains and deserve punishment more than any others. I have sent runners to the various villages, as requested, and the chiefs have returned word that they will be in for a council on April 10. If the commanding general will wait until then, which is only three days, I am sure that everything will be adjusted satisfactorily."

"We will wait," remarked General Hancock, tersely. "Colonel Leavenworth, have you anything that you desire to say?"

"Nothing more than I have already said, sir," answered Colonel Leavenworth. "I can only repeat that in my opinion the Kiowas and Comanches are the ones who have been wronged—grossly wronged by having had laid at their doors numerous misdeeds for which the other tribes of this district are responsible and for which they should be severely chastised. Here!" he added. "Here's Satanta himself. He'll speak for the Kiowas."

From down the Santa Fé trail were approaching at a gallop a small party of Indians, their blankets and head-dresses tossing in the clear air. Foremost rode a man who might have been a soldier, for he wore a shirt and a sabre; but feathers in his hair announced the Indian. Diverging from the trail, to cross the level sandy sod, at a short distance from the gathering he dismounted, on the edge of camp, and leaving

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his horse (a superb bay, gaily decorated with paint and trappings), accompanied by the other Indians, also dismounted, he advanced on foot.

"Satanta!" ran a murmur; and officers and men stared openly.

Ned, as well as everybody else in the West, knew of Satanta, the celebrated war chief of the fighting Kiowas; leader in many a raid, and crafty and eloquent. Of medium height, but burly and muscular, he bore himself proudly. His black hair, stained vermillion at the parting, was combed smoothly down upon either side of a rather good-natured face. At the left it lengthened into a braid but at the right it was clipped short—the sign of the Kiowa. An eagle feather was stuck through, above the braid. His eyes were shrewd and twinkling, his forehead was broad and high, and under a broad straight nose was set a thin-lipped, straight mouth. From his chin grew a few bristles, but the majority evidently had been plucked out. All in all, he had an intelligent face, with a humorous touch to it.

As he strode, with his powerful frame and heavy body he made a fine figure. His sabre clanked against his bare legs, to his satisfaction, and upon the bosom of his stained cotton shirt he wore a dangling silver pendant.

"Satanta! Satanta!"

"How?" grunted Satanta, as the circle opened to greet him. He shook hands all around; and with

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sundry "Hows?" his companions also shook hands.

The Indians stolidly seated themselves; so did the officers. From one of his followers Satanta accepted, in princely fashion, a long-stemmed pipe. It had been filled, and now with flint and steel it was lighted, and starting with Satanta was passed about. Everybody in turn solemnly took a puff. General Custer almost choked, for he did not use tobacco.

"Let one of the scouts interpret," bade General Hancock.

"Romeo," bade General Custer.

"Tell him that we're ready to hear what he has to say," instructed General Hancock, to Romeo the little Mexican.

Romeo spoke a guttural sentence to the chief; Satanta grunted shortly.

"He wants presents," translated Romeo.

"Presents will be brought," answered the general.

The preliminaries having been concluded, Satanta majestically arose, for his speech. With shoulders back he stood, facing the half circle of white men, his arms folded. He began to speak. As he proceeded, Romeo the Mexican translated sentence by sentence, the chief each time waiting for him to do so.

"I call on the sun to witness that I will talk straight," said Satanta. "My tongue is not forked. It cannot tell lies. I understand that you were coming down to see us. My heart is glad and I shall hide nothing from you. I have moved away from those

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Indians who want war, and I have come also to see you and speak with you. The Kiowas and the Comanches are not those who have been fighting. The Cheyennes are the ones who fight. They fight in the day, and not in the night. If I had been fighting, I would have fought by day, too. Two years ago I made peace with your chiefs, Harney, Sanborn and Leavenworth, at the mouth of the Little Arkansas. This peace I have never broken. I have not done anything and I am not afraid. I am ready to listen to good words. We have been waiting a long time to see you, and we were getting tired. All the land south of the Arkansas belongs to the Kiowas and Comanches, and I don't want to give any of it away. I love the land and the buffalo, and will not part with it. When your soldiers come through the land, they kill many buffalo and let them lie. Is the white man a child, that he should recklessly kill and not eat? When the red men kill game, they do so that they may live and not starve. I want you to understand well what I say. Put it on paper. Let the Great Father at Washington see it, and let me know what he says. I hear a great deal of good talk from the teachers that the Great Father sends to us, but they never do what they say they will do. I don't want any of the medicine lodges (schools and churches) in my country. I want my children raised as I was. We thank you for your presents. We know you are doing the best you can. I and my head men also will do the best we can. You

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are all big chiefs. When you are in the country we go to sleep happy and are not afraid. I have heard that you intend to settle us on a reservation. I don't want to settle," and Satanta's voice was high. "I love to roam the prairies. There I feel free and happy, but when we settle down we grow pale and die. I have laid aside my lance and shield and bow, because I feel safe in your presence. I have told you the truth. I have no little lies hid about me, but I don't know how it is with you. Are you as clear as I am? A long time ago all this land belonged to our fathers. Now when I go beside the river I see camps of soldiers on its banks. These soldiers cut down my timber; they kill my buffalo; and when I see that, my heart feels like bursting. As I came here to-day, upon the trail I picked up a little switch that had been torn up and thrown away. It hurt me to see this. I thought, if this little twig had been allowed to grow, it would have made a mighty tree, to shelter my people and supply them with shade and wood. The white men destroyed it." Satanta here made a wide gesture. "But as I look around over the prairie I see that it is large and good, and I do not want it stained with the blood of the whites. If the treaty brings to us prosperity, as you say, we will like it all the better. But if it brings us good or ill, we will not abandon it. When I make a peace, it is a long and lasting peace. I have spoken."

When Satanta had finished, a murmur of approval,

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in satisfied grunts, arose from the other Indians; and even the officers exchanged words of admiration. Satanta had made a great speech.

"Tell him," quoth General Hancock, to Romeo, "that we have heard, and are glad to know that he is our friend. We do not come in war, but in peace. Tell him that in token of our friendship we give him the uniform of a great white chief."

At a sign by the general another officer brought forward, to Satanta, the coat and sash and hat of a major-general. They were of a style that had been changed by later regulations but this made no difference to Satanta, who seemed much pleased with the epaulets and the double row of brass buttons, and the red silk sash, and the cocked hat adorned by a black curling plume. He immediately donned the new rig, to strut about, bare-legged, in it, dragging his sabre.

Presently he and all his braves, after procuring what they could at the fort, took the trail whence they had come.

"That, gentlemen, was a marvelous speech. It would be a credit to a white man," commented General Hancock, impressively, to the assembled audience.

"I've known Satanta or White Bear ever since I was a small boy and followed my father about, out here on the plains," said Colonel Leavenworth. "I regard him as the greatest Indian. He lives in style at his tipi. Has a brass horn that he blows for meals, and a carpet, and brass-studded lapboards to eat from."

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"In my opinion Satanta is a rascal, gentlemen," spoke quietly Wild Bill. "Nobody can deny that he makes a big talk; but deeds count, in this country—and if that fellow doesn't make more trouble, at his first chance, I don't know Injuns. He's smart, and he's crooked as a prairie dog burrow."

Ned kept his eyes open for the figure of Pawnee Killer. He hoped that Pawnee Killer would visit, from the village, and might be made to tell General Hancock or General Custer where his, Ned's, sister was.

"No Injuns will come in till the tenth," asserted Sergeant Kennedy. "'Tisn't Injun etiquette to appear before the date of the council."

"The infarnal rascals may not come anyhow," declared California Joe, wagging his head. "They're the onsartineest liars that ever was created. But we're goin' to have our hands full without 'em, for some sort of a pesky storm is breedin'. Do ye mark how geese are flyin' south, 'stead o' north? Mebbe they think it's fall 'stead o' spring; but I never ketched wild honkers bein' mistook on dates."

The day was warm and sunny—almost too warm. The evening stayed clear, while the camp peacefully slept, but the morning dawned with a haze and a chill wind from the north. Speedily the haze thickened, the wind grew colder; and before breakfast was over the snow was sifting faster and faster.

It was a big storm for the ninth of April. All

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day the flakes fell furiously, while the cold increased. By night the snow was eight inches deep. Long before night the officers and men had piled on all the extra clothes that they could find, and were huddled about wrapped in overcoats and blankets, handkerchiefs bent over their ears. California Joe made a comical figure, his wide-brimmed sombrero tied down with a rope into a coal-scuttle shape, so that its brim on either side touched his shoulders. Around his neck was a red tippet that looked as if it once might have encircled an Indian's waist. The tail of his cavalry overcoat was singed by camp-fires. On his feet were gunny-sacks wrapped tightly about, to make a bundle, and his hands were deeply buried in his overcoat pockets while under the scoop of his hat issued volumes of smoke from his black pipe.

He looked funny, did California Joe; but not all things were funny. Of course, there were no tents or fires for the horses. They were tied along a picket rope stretched from stake to stake; and here they turned tail to the cutting wind and shivered and shrank, as the snow piled upon their backs. Yes, and undoubtedly they would have perished, if General Custer had not ordered that they be given double rations of oats, and that the guards pass up and down, up and down, during the night, whipping them to make them move. Twice Ned stole away to inspect Buckie; and found him doing as well as possible.

V

IN BATTLE ARRAY

WITH stiff lips Ned at sunrise time blew first call for a cavalry camp pretty well frozen up; and the cheery notes of reveille failed to awaken much enthusiasm among the soldiers. At assembly for roll-call the men fell in wrapped to their noses, their overcoat-collars turned high and clothes tied down over their ears.

However, the snow had ceased, the sun was peeping out, and evidently the storm had passed. Now the April sun would soon lay bare the plains.

General Custer had not seemed to mind the storm; and out of it had gained some fun, as usual. Ned heard him telling a joke, with great peals of laughter, to his brother Colonel Tom Custer and several other officers.

“Ha-ha-ha!” How they all roared and chuckled, none more loudly than the general himself.

Nobody expected that the Indians would come in to-day, which was the tenth, for the snow and the cold would keep them housed. Two soldiers rode away

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with a dispatch-bag crammed with letters from officers and men, for Riley and the East; and the general's letter to Mrs. Custer, which Ned delivered at the very last moment, must have been the fattest of all. No dispatch bearer went from march or camp without, as appeared, a letter from the general for Mrs. Custer. He kept a regular diary.

The sun shone, but the weather remained biting cold. However, it was thought that the Indians would come in on the morrow, which was the eleventh. In the morning Pawnee Killer sent word that he had started with his people for the fort, when they had discovered a large herd of buffalo; so they had stopped to get meat.

This excuse did not please General Hancock or any of the officers; and even Major Wyncoop was hard put to explain why buffalo should be more important than a council engagement.

"They don't mean to come in, gentlemen," declared Wild Bill, to General Hancock and Custer and others. "They're playing for time; that's all. The first thing you know, they'll have cleared out. It's no part of their intentions to hold any sort of a pow-wow. This snow'll fetch along the grass; and after that, look out!"

"If they don't come to us, we'll go to them," announced General Hancock. "We'll give them twenty-four hours more to keep their promise."

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The general was as good as his word. On the evening of the next day orders went forth through the camp to prepare for an early march on the following morning.

This evening several Dog Soldier chiefs, led by Tall Bull, a Cheyenne, did come riding in, out of the sunset glow, for supper and the little Cheyenne boy. A young man named Edmond Guerrier acted as interpreter. His father had been a French-Canadian trapper at old Fort Laramie on the Platte, and his mother had been a Cheyenne woman. Like his father, he had married a Cheyenne, and he lived with the Cheyennes whenever he wished to. The commander at Fort Larned and Major Wyncoop recommended him as a first class interpreter.

The talk did not amount to anything, because the chiefs said nothing of importance. But they spent the night as guests of General Hancock, in a tent put up for them.

Early in the morning the visiting chiefs left, taking with them the little Cheyenne boy, who hung back and whimpered.

"He's white, now," commented Wild Bill, watching. "In a month he'll be red, and in six Cheyenne'll be the only tongue he knows."

"Fust thing they'll do'll be to peel those store clothes off'n him, an' put him into blanket an' leggins," spoke California Joe. "Tomorrer you wouldn't recognize him."

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Now all was ready for the march onward to the village. Soon after the Indians had left the clear notes of the "General" rang from bugles of cavalry, infantry and artillery. Down, in a twinkling, fell flat every tent. The canvas was quickly roped into square packs, and passed into the wagons. Speedily ranks were formed, the cavalry mounted, and on up Pawnee Fork of the Arkansas, from Fort Larned marched the troops.

The route followed the river, which, willow and alder bordered, wound crookedly. The scouts rode ahead and on either side—Fall Leaf and his braves being especially vigilant, for all the Western Indians were their enemies.

Moving figures were sighted, before. They were Indians, but they kept out of hailing distance. A great smoke arose, which according to some opinions in the column was caused by the Indians burning the buffalo-grass so that there would be no forage for the expedition. Then, toward evening, when the Indian village was yet ten miles distant, down from above came galloping another party of chiefs and warriors.

They were escorted in by Wild Bill, and were introduced to General Hancock. Pressing their horses to the horses of the white men, they shook hands.

"There's Pawnee Killer!" exclaimed Ned, excited as he peered. "See him? The man with the yellow shield, on the spotted horse."

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General Custer heard the words, and reined back a moment.

"The scouts all say that he won't tell you anything about your sister," warned the general. "It's very likely he doesn't know. But we'll find her. Maybe not this week, or next, but sometime; we're on the right track to do so."

"Yes, sir," answered Ned, earnestly.

The chiefs' party had turned and were riding along with the commanding officer's staff; their painted ponies pranced nimbly; blankets and fringes shook in the breeze.

Night was falling, the march had covered twenty-one long miles, and the infantry soldiers were well weary. So within nine miles of the Indian village the column went into camp, upon the banks of the Pawnee Fork.

Not till then did Ned have opportunity to get near Pawnee Killer. He was not afraid of the chief, now; for did he not carry a six-shooter revolver and wear a sabre, and besides, was he not a soldier, in the uniform of the United States army? However, he felt sure that Pawnee Killer would recognize him. And at last, in the dusk, as Pawnee Killer, blanket wrapped, was stalking by, Ned hailed him, in Sioux, with a short:

"How, kola?" (Hello, friend?)

Pawnee Killer halted, glanced aside.

"How?" he said.

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"You know me, Pawnee Killer?"

"No;" and Pawnee Killer would pass on.

"Wait. Where's my sister?"

Pawnee Killer impatiently shook his head. Not a muscle of his dark face changed. How Ned hated him, at that moment: hated him, for the wrongs received—for memory of slain father and mother, and hard camp life of himself and his sister. He scarcely could keep his fingers off his revolver, could young Ned, standing there returning glare for glare.

"Heap fool. White boy heap fool," grunted Pawnee Killer, contemptuously, and drawing closer about him his blanket, he stalked on. Ned sprang a step after him; then stopped short. He must not be hasty. He must wait. General Custer had promised him, and he, Ned, was only one victim among many. Yes, he would wait, and depend upon the general.

Before taps it was understood throughout the camp (for gossip traveled fast, especially when California Joe was about to carry news among the fires) that Pawnee Killer and White Horse were to spend the night as guests of General Hancock; and that in the morning all the chiefs of the village should assemble in the camp for the council. Therefore early in the morning—but not until after he had heartily breakfasted—Pawnee Killer rode out, to bring, he said, the other chiefs.

The camp waited.

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Nine o'clock, or when the sun was three hours high, was the hour set for the council. Nine o'clock came and passed, but Pawnee Killer and the other chiefs did not come. Then it was that a new chief arrived, riding briskly in from the direction of the village. Bull Bear was his name, according to California Joe; a Cheyenne.

Met by Wild Bill, he was conducted straight to General Hancock's headquarters, and another of the many talks was held. California Joe, loafing near the Custer tent, where stood on duty Ned the orderly bugler of the Seventh Cavalry, laughed in his shaggy whiskers.

"Those thar Injuns never mean to meet the soldiers in ary council whatsomever," he asserted. "Fust thing we know, they'll all be gone, skedaddled. An' I'll bet my ol' mule agin a pound o' baccy that the women an' children are leavin' already. If we want to ketch that village, we got to get thar mighty quick."

Evidently this was General Hancock's opinion. He had been trifled with long enough. Bull Bear, with a stolid but well-fed expression, rode away as had Pawnee Killer and other chiefs. And presently General Custer, striding quickly back from the conference, bade, in satisfied tone, to Adjutant Moylan: "We're off. Strike the tents."

The infantry bugles were ringing the "General," and Ned hastened to join for the cavalry. Down came

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the tents. And with "Boots and Saddles" and "To Horse" the Seventh Cavalry was prepared for the march or for battle.

Again the expedition was put in motion, and went clanking and creaking and rumbling across country, ascending along the Pawnee Fork as if this time bound right through to the village.

Now the formation indicated that General Hancock, likewise, was prepared for peace or war. The infantry took the advance, with the artillery and engineers close behind, the river protecting the left flank, and the cavalry protecting the right. The scouts rode ahead, for they were the eyes of the column. And well did the doughty General Hancock use caution; when only a few miles had been covered, back came galloping Wild Bill, with hand high, as signal to halt. At the same moment, almost, rounding a turn in the route the heads of the columns emerged into a wondrous, startling sight.

The vista opened out, with never a tree or a shrub to break it, until it was cut sharp by a motionless battle-line. There they sat, upon their ponies, bay, black, white, and spotted—half a thousand Indian warriors, all panoplied for fight. Shields shone white, yellow, and red; lances floated crimson tufts; great war-bonnets of feather crests brightly tinted almost covered the riders; war-paint streaked face and body and pony; and the glitter of rifle and re-

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volver showed that the array was armed like the white men.

Midway between the two parties were the scouts, in extended order. The Delawares had dropped their blankets from their shoulders and naked to the waist they sat alert and restless, eager to fight. Fall Leaf held aloft his rifle and shook it tauntingly.

Up and down the line of mounted warriors were riding the war chiefs gesturing and talking, as if keeping their men in order. But General Hancock had not been idle. Instantly his aides had spurred to right and to left, bearing his commands. The infantry and artillery bugles pealed shrill; and on came the aide to instruct the cavalry. Pulling his yellow moustache, General Custer waited impatiently.

Arriving, the aide (he was a young lieutenant) reined his horse to its haunches, and saluted.

"The commanding general sends his compliments, sir, and directs that the cavalry form line of battle on the right."

"Troops right front into line. Two troops in reserve," spoke the general, instantly, to his adjutant, Lieutenant Moylan; and he nodded at Ned to blow the call. His blue eyes were flaming; he looked happy. Away spurred Lieutenant Moylan, down the column of fours, bearing the orders. Bugle after bugle took up the strain. Out to right trotted the fours, extending the cavalry front, by troop after troop, until six

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were on the line. Two composed a second line, as a reserve.

The infantry also had double-quickèd into company front, and company after company had come upon the battle line. Into the center had wheeled at a gallop the artillery, and had unlimbered.

“Companies—load!”

With rattle and thud the long Springfield breech-loaders remodeled from the muzzle-loaders of the Civil War came to a “load,” and prepared for the “aim, fire.”

“Draw—sabres!” The general’s voice rang high.

With rasp of steel six hundred sabres flashed in the morning sun.

VI

THE ABANDONED INDIAN VILLAGE

RECALLED by one of the aides, the scouts had slowly ridden back, the Delawares especially being reluctant to leave the fore. As they passed, General Custer called out, to Wild Bill:

“Is it a fight, Bill?”

“Looks peculiar,” answered Wild Bill, jogging on. He was not a man of many words. But California Joe neglected no opportunity to talk, and obligingly pausing, in front of the cavalry, from his mule he took up the conversation.

“If we do fight it ’s goin’ to be the gol-durndest fracas ever you got into. Those Injuns seem to think they can whip the hull Yewnited States army. An Injun’ll beat a white man runnin’, every time, so I ’spect our best holt is fittin’; but marcy on us, look at ’em! Thar ain’t ’nough of us to go half round. It’s a big thing, I tell ’ee, an’ if we lick those varmints we got to get up an’ dust. Mebbe it won’t be fittin’; mebbe it’ll be jest wipin’ ’em out. But they got a powerful lot o’ weepons, furnished ’em by the Injun department to kill soldiers with. See those rifles, will

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ye? They'll outshoot these hyar sawed-off carbines o' yourn. Well, reckon I'll jine the infantry," and still maundering on California Joe leisurely rode through an interval, and posted himself elsewhere. His voice, amiably addressing all around him, never ceased; but nobody longer paid attention to him. The crisis was too acute, when two such lines, of the red and of the white, in battle array faced one another.

The plains back of the Indians' line was dotted with more Indians, in bunches, like reserves, and in little squads, as if for courier duty. The chiefs had faced about, watchful of the soldiers' line; and for a moment intense silence reigned. Each line eyed the other, waiting for the first movement.

General Hancock, accompanied by Guerrier the interpreter, and Wild Bill the chief of scouts, and by several officers of his staff, boldly rode forward, halting when midway. Guerrier called with a loud voice, in Cheyenne, and made sign, for a conference. Thereupon out from the ranks of the Indians rode a party of chiefs, holding aloft, on a lance butt, a white rag. At a signal from General Hancock, and the start of an aide, General Custer advanced to take part in the interview.

California Joe, poking forward again, coolly took his place before the cavalry line, and proceeded to talk, as usual.

"Now thar'll be more palaver," he announced, to all hearers, "an' meanwhile the village is packin' up

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an' skadoodlin'. Know those 'er chiefs? The big feller with the flag o' truce is Roman Nose, Cheyenne—an' he ain't no slouch, boys, either. T'others o' the Cheyennes are Bull Bear, White Horse, Gray Beard an' Medicine Wolf; rest are Sioux, bein' that rascal Pawnee Killer, Bad Wound, Left Hand, Little Bear, Little Bull, an' Tall Bear That Walks Under the Ground. Shakin' hands, are they? Wall, reckon we don't fight to-day. Mebbe next time. Guess I'll go see. Giddap!" And away cantered California Joe, backward in nothing, to overhear the conference.

The talk appeared to be satisfactory, for presently the chiefs returned to their line, and the staff officers dispersed upon various errands. General Custer rejoined his command. The Indian line had wheeled about, and was riding away in a jostling, disorderly mass. The first orders issued up and down the battle front of the whites indicated that the march was to be resumed.

Now in column again, the expedition followed the warriors.

General Hancock seemed tired of the delays. No halt was made, little was said (except by California Joe, who ambled along as he pleased, discoursing right and left, and to himself); the scouts, in compact body, and the general and staff, led; the troops plodded behind; and at last, toward sunset, in a curve of the stream, before, appeared the crossed poles of many white lodges, welling evening smoke.

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"Thar's yore village," yelled California Joe, to the cavalry which he evidently had adopted. "Three hundred lodges, half Cheyenne, half Sioux. Fine place, too, ain't it? Plenty wood an' water an' grass, an' those thar bluffs on north an' west to fend off the wind. Trust an Injun to make a good camp."

An aide came galloping to General Custer.

"The compliments of the commanding general, sir, and he directs that the cavalry go into camp on the right, half a mile before reaching the village. Guards will be posted to prevent any communication between the soldiers and the village. It is the general's desire that the Indians shall not be annoyed by visitors."

"Huh!" grunted California Joe. "Now, if that ain't the most *con-siderate* gen'ral I ever see. Mustn't annoy the pore Injun, hey? Wall, I'll be horn-swoggled!"

Little occurred, in camp, during the evening, except that Roman Nose (who indeed was a fine-looking Indian, tall and powerful, broad-chested, and beak-nosed), Grey Bear and Medicine Wolf of the Cheyennes came in, and soon two of them left, mounted on cavalry horses. From the conversation between the general and Lieutenant Moylan, Ned learned that the squaws and children had run from the village, because they feared so many white soldiers; or, at least, thus had claimed the chiefs; and now two of the chiefs had been sent to overtake them and bring them back.

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The night settled crisp and dark, with the moon hidden by drifting clouds. Not a sound issued from the direction of the Indian village, where dimly gleamed the white skin lodges of the Cheyennes and the Sioux. Ned blew "Tattoo," and "Taps" for lights out; and the cavalry camp as well as the infantry and artillery camp, went to bed. General Custer's tent had been pitched by itself, near to General Hancock's. The little "pup" tent of Ned was beside the tent of the adjutant, Lieutenant Moylan. And all was still.

Ned had been sound asleep, in his blankets, when suddenly he was wakened by a voice, speaking low but distinct.

"Moylan! Moylan! Oh, Moylan!"

"What is it?" and Lieutenant Moylan stirred.

"It's I—Custer. Open up."

"Yes, sir."

Lieutenant Moylan hastily arose, and fumbled at the flaps, untying them. Ned peered out, the dim figure of General Custer was just visible.

"Don't make a light," he said. "The regiment is ordered to move out, at once. Guerrier has come in from the village and reports all the warriors saddling to leave in a hurry. The general wants us to surround the village and nip that movement in the bud. The best way will be for us to notify the company commanders, one at a time, and they can tell the first sergeants. You take one battalion and I'll take the

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other. Fletcher will follow me. No noise, mind. Have the men saddle up and fall in without bugle signals or any other signals, if possible. Sabres held to prevent clanking."

The general was not kept waiting long, where he stood by the tent flaps; speedily Lieutenant Moylan was treading with silent, hasty foot, in the one direction, and Ned was following his leader in the other.

Amidst the serried canvases occurred a resurrection as the captains sought the first sergeants, and the first sergeants passed rapidly from tent to tent, whispering through to the men. With astonishingly little confusion or noise the horses were saddled, the companies were mounted, and all was ready.

A slight bustle from the remainder of the camp indicated that the infantry and artillery also had been awakened and were being put under arms.

This was exciting; and as off they rode, at a walk, in long column, through the still night, Ned, behind the general and Adjutant Moylan and Guerrier the interpreter, thrilled with it. They were going to surround the Indian village; and there might be a fight.

Every sabre was tucked between leg and saddle-flap, so that it would not clink. All in silence proceeded the shadowy column. Orders were given in a whisper, and by whisper passed from troop to troop. The moon was almost full, but luckily the clouds con-

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cealed it constantly. In the distance before flickered the red light of a camp fire, at the village; it was made the guide.

The column swung in an oblique change of direction, to strike the village from above. This was a good move, for if the Indians tried to escape, they would be forced to run right into the infantry, at the camp.

"Do you think they suspect we're coming, Guerrier?" in low tone asked the general.

"I do not think so," answered Guerrier.

"We'll have to watch sharp for an ambushade, Moylan," prompted the general. "Our visit may not please the red gentlemen."

Now the column was near. The moon peeped out between clouds, and then could be seen the glimmer of the white buffalo-hide lodges amidst the grove of willows and cottonwoods by the river.

"Have each rear troop deploy, in succession, as skirmishers, forming a continuous line facing inward, around the village," ordered the general, to the adjutant. "But quietly, remember." And back rode Lieutenant Moylan, carrying the instructions.

Skillfully the great circle was formed; for when, suddenly, out from the clouds burst the moon, shining like a light-house on an island of the sky, it revealed the cavalrymen sitting motionless on their motionless horses, in a great fringe; and in the center was the

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ghostly village. Just a little breeze sighed softly through the cottonwoods, while the stream flowing through grove and village murmured music.

A horseman rode from down the line. It was the regimental surgeon, Dr. Coates—a jolly man, always eager for adventure.

“By thunder! Believe they’re all asleep yet,” he whispered, excited.

“What do you think, Guerrier?” queried the general, ill at ease.

“Can’t tell. Maybe,” answered the half-breed, peering from his pony.

“Well, we can go in and see. I’d like to know whether we’ve captured a deserted village, after all.”

“Sweet Auburn, loveliest village of the plain,” quoted the doctor, who was given to saying such things.

“Nothing very sweet about an Indian village, doctor,” retorted the general. “I’ll just take you along, to prove it. Tell the officers to have their troops wait at a ready, Moylan, while we take a nearer look. Come back at once. I want you with me.”

The adjutant quickly started the word down the circle, and returned.

“We’d better all go in,” bade the general, dismounting. “The bugler, too. I may need him. Leave your horses here.”

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Quickly Ned swung from Buckie. Quickly swung from their horses also the doctor, and the lieutenant, and Guerrier the interpreter. They left the animals in charge of an orderly, and trudged forward afoot.

The general and Guerrier led. The moonlight made walking easy, and staring hard at the tents, step by step they advanced, across the open space separating the cavalry circle from the village in the middle. Nothing happened. As before, silence, broken only by the slight breeze and the tinkling water, reigned.

Guerrier called out loudly, in Cheyenne. Instantly a dog barked, and another, and another, until a furious angry chorus rent the quiet moonlight.

"Many dogs," he said. "So I think they still there. Dogs would go, too."

"Call again."

He did so. The doctor had nervously drawn his revolver.

"Then why don't they answer?"

"Guess they wait, in the trees; and when we get nearer, maybe they shoot. No like this."

"That's a comforting idea," blurted the general. "But we've gone too far to back out with honor now. Let's investigate those first lodges."

He drew his revolver. Lieutenant Moylan drew his, and Ned imitated. The butt of the heavy Colt's six-shooter felt good to his hand. Once more they stole forward, this time more cautiously. Ned's heart

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beat with a thumpity-thumpity ; but he was not afraid, where the general led.

The general dropped to hands and knees, as example to the others, and thus crept to the nearest of the little bunch of lodges. Occasionally he stopped, and listened ; and then stopped and listened all, holding their breaths. Still from the trees sped no arrow, belched no sudden shot, pealed no shrill, exultant voice ; and from the lodges issued not a sound.

“ I believe every soul has fled,” spoke the general, more in ordinary tone, and somewhat as if relieved. He arose to stooping posture. Guerrier advanced quickly to the first of the lodges, pulled aside the mat that closed the entrance, and stepped within. One after another they followed. The lodge was empty of inmate.

The familiar odor of Indian—of smoked skins and kinnikinnick or the leaf and tobacco mixture used by the Indian in pipes, of dogs and of grease, smote Ned’s nostrils. Yes, he had been saturated with it, himself, in his days of captivity. A fire was still burning low in the center of the lodge, shedding a faint light, so that they could see about them. And gaze about them they did, the doctor the most curiously of all. Things had been left as if the owners had just stepped out. Soft buffalo robes covered the ground ; the robe beds were in place, with the head rolls for pillows ; the *parfleches* or boxes of hard bull-hide were carefully

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stowed away along the edges of the tent, as customary, and they were full of Indian handiwork. Paint-bags, hide ropes, moccasins—everything was there, awaiting use. And over the smouldering fire was hanging a kettle, which gently simmered with a steam that smelled extremely good.

This attracted the inquisitive doctor's nose and eye, and he proceeded to investigate.

"Great Scott!" he said. "What is it—soup? Where's a ladle, or spoon, or something? Here; I've found one. You fellows dragged me out without any lunch. I'm hungry. Wait. I've always wanted to try Indian cooking. It ought to be first class." He probed about in the kettle, and with his horn spoon extracted a chunk the size of his fist. "What do you suppose this is," he queried, holding it up and turning it about. "Um-m! Delicious smell."

"Taste it," bade the general.

"I will." And the doctor did. He smacked his lips. "Excellent! Excellent!" he exclaimed, and munched it down with great satisfaction. "Must be buffalo, cooked by a new process."

"Here's Guerrier," spoke the lieutenant. "He'll know."

Guerrier had vanished, on further tour of inspection; now he re-entered.

"What's this meat, Guerrier?" asked the doctor, eagerly. "Try it. Take my spoon."

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Guerrier willingly enough plunged the spoon into the kettle, and hooked a piece the largest yet. He set his teeth into it.

"Why, it's dog, of course," he informed, eating away.

"Dog!" gasped the doctor. "Thunder and Mars! Ugh! Why didn't somebody say so?" And out he rushed.

Ned had suspected the same, but he had not been asked. Now chuckled and swayed the general and the lieutenant, smothering their glee.

"Let's look further," quoth the general. "There may be other surprises. Any sign of the Indians about, Guerrier?"

"No. Village deserted," answered Guerrier.

They emerged from the lodge, into the moonlight, and rummaged here and there. Guerrier disappeared again.

"In my opinion," remarked the general, "that half-breed knew of this all along. He was supposed to report to headquarters the first token that the village was being abandoned. Instead, he waited, to let the Indians clear out, then he reported. You know, his wife was in the village; and so he wanted to make her safe."

"Humph!" grunted the doctor and the lieutenant.

The general went poking about; so did the others. One lodge did not have any fire; its interior was dark, when the general stuck his head in; and picking up a

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splinter of wood he lighted it, for a torch. Then in he boldly went—only to call back, handing the splinter forth again.

“Light this, will you, doctor? It blew out on me.”

The doctor hastened away, to light the splinter at a lodge fire, and Ned waited for him. The general must have been moving in the dark, inside, for Ned heard a quick exclamation from him, and he thought that next he caught a strange voice, addressing the general in Indian. It was a low, quavering voice; and he was not certain. He clutched his revolver, listening, poised for action. Nothing more was said beyond the lodge doorway; but the doctor seemed gone a very long time. At last here he came, bearing the light.

“Is that you, doctor?” spoke the general, quickly. “Watch sharp, when you enter, and be ready for trouble. Cock your revolver. There’s an Indian in this place. I stepped on him, and I hear him.”

Through the doorway burst the doughty doctor, torch in one hand, cocked revolver in the other. After him pressed Ned, revolver thrust forward, eyes wide, heart thumping, but resolved, he, to play the man.

The general was standing at the far side, his hunting-knife bared—for in the dark his revolver would have been of little use. And there, between him and the door, was the Indian—but perhaps not an Indian. It was a little girl, lying wrapped in buffalo robe, on the floor.

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Ned stared, his breath short. For a moment he expected that he had found his sister! Then a second look told him that this little girl was black haired and swarthy skinned, not at all touching the fairness of Mary. So he relaxed, disappointed.

"Aha!" quoth the general, "I see. We won't hurt you, my girl. I guess she's the more alarmed of the two. Where's Guerrier? He ought to talk to her. Fetch Guerrier, Ned."

Forth hustled Ned, and found Guerrier. When they came back, the doctor was bending over the little girl, and petting her, while she continued to roll her shy eyes, much alarmed, and would have hid her head in her robe.

"Deserted her, the cowardly ruffians," denounced the general. "Ask her, Guerrier."

Guerrier spoke to her in Cheyenne; she softly answered.

"Yes," said Guerrier. "Left her. She half white. She sick, too."

"I thought so," murmured the doctor.

"Find Lieutenant Moylan, bugler," ordered the general, quickly, to Ned. "Give him my compliments and tell him to call in the troop commanders and have the village thoroughly searched. Also tell him to dispatch a courier to General Hancock, informing him that the village is abandoned."

Ned met Lieutenant Moylan just outside, and delivered the message. However, the search revealed

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no other occupants save the dogs, and an aged, crippled Sioux who had been unable to travel. In the moonlight or in the lodges was there no sign as to which direction the fugitives from the village had taken.

The courier reported back to General Custer that a detachment of infantry were being sent on, to occupy the village and hold it. Dr. Coates in the meantime had tenderly ministered to the needs of the sick little girl, and of the old man. There was nothing more for the Custer cavalry to do here. With a brief statement of facts to the commander of the infantry, marching in, leaving his troops to follow the general galloped away for the camp, Ned, orderly bugler, and Adjutant Moylan, following hard. But their horses were no match for Phil Sheridan; and, as usual, the general beat.

By the manner in which he rode, evidently he anticipated much work.

VII

SCOUTING WITH CUSTER

GENERAL CUSTER wasted no time. Neither did General Hancock. So within a very few minutes after the two generals were together at camp, plans were complete. When the troops of the Seventh came riding in at a trot their officers were met at once with the orders, from headquarters, to prepare their commands for the trail. The Indians were to be pursued, and this was cavalry work.

“Light marching order. One hundred rounds of ammunition to the man, but all other supplies cut down to the last necessary ounce,” were the instructions, as delivered by Adjutant Moylan.

So again was a bustle of preparation—filling of mess-chests, tightening of horse-shoes, rolling of blankets, all in the light of camp fire and moon. Before daybreak the Seventh Cavalry was ready: eight companies, the band, and a squad of the scouts led by Wild Bill and Fall Leaf.

The east was pink when General Custer, standing impatiently waiting for the light, beside Custis Lee (to whom he had changed), spoke shortly to Ned; and from the trumpet of the headquarters bugler

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pealed the bars of "Boots and Saddles." Willingly enough the Seventh Cavalry men again formed lines, and mounted; for now they were rid of the "dough boys," and would travel fast and far, to catch the pesky Indians.

A frost had whitened the ground, and had been marked by horse tracks, so that at the village were many trails. But the Delawares ranged hither-thither until, with a triumphant whoop, the youngest warrior of all announced that he had found the real trail.

The general's sabre flashed in the beams of the rising sun.

"By fours, right! For-r-r'd—march!"

"By fours, right! For-r-r'd—march!" was repeated down the column the command. The Seventh Cavalry was off, on its first independent scout.

The fan-shaped line of the scouts, with Wild Bill and Fall Leaf to the fore, held the advance, that they might read the trail. After, came the cavalry, the general and his adjutant at its head, baggage wagons toward the rear, and a rear-guard of one troop behind. General Custer had again donned his buckskin hunting-coat, which was so comfortable for him, and which would indicate hard work ahead. He looked as he had when Ned had first seen him. And hard work ahead was the expectation, for the Indians had gained a good start.

'At rapid walk of the horses rode they all. The trailing lodge-poles of the fleeing village made a trail

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plain to every eye. A feeling of satisfaction spread when, after a time, the scouts before started on at a gallop, with wave of rifle and flutter of blanket, for a little grove ahead. A faint curl of smoke could be sighted; and there was a glimpse of moving forms.

"Sound the trot," promptly bade the general.

At Ned's bugle signal, "Trot—march!" was repeated down the eager column. Away they spurred, ready to deploy into action. But after a brief pause, to reconnoiter, the scouts had proceeded boldly. When the column reached the place they found only the still burning fires where the Indians had halted for hasty breakfast, and several ponies, with packs, left tethered to the trees. And here was a strange Indian, strutting about arrayed in a panoply of bright crimson feathers, while the scouts looked on and laughed.

However, this was only the Delaware General Jackson, Fall Leaf's nephew, who had arrived first at the grove and had made a capture of the ponies.

"Roman Nose!" he proclaimed, "Heap feather. Ugh!"

"One o' these pony packs belonged to Roman Nose, the Delawares say," explained Wild Bill, to General Custer. "That youngster's as proud as if he'd captured the chief himself."

There was nothing for which to stop here; and paying no more attention to the ponies or the breakfast camp, allowing the Delawares to do what they pleased with the packs, the Seventh Cavalry pressed

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on. Jackson rode exultant, his braids ornamented with the Roman Nose feathers.

"We're out-trailing them," asserted the general, to Lieutenant Moylan. "The only question is, can we overtake them before dark? We've got to do it."

The baggage wagons were dropped behind, with a squadron of two troops to guard them. The three other squadrons traveled the faster, and ever the trail led northward, as for the Smoky Hill Fork, or the Platte beyond.

Noon had passed, but there was no halt for dinner. General Custer evidently was not a man to delay on the trail. Suddenly Ned realized that it was not a question alone of capturing the Indians; it was the bigger question of saving the settlers. From friendlies these Cheyennes and Sioux had threatened to become hostiles, and their trail bent straight not only for the Indian country to the north, but also for the stage routes, and the settlements of the Smoky Hill Fork, and the Republican, and the Saline, and all.

The afternoon waxed and waned, and still never a glimpse of the Indians was given. Presently the scouts in the advance slackened, hovered, and spread to right and left, nosing like hounds. They were at fault. Then was it seen that the trail suddenly had divided, out-flaring into a score of smaller trails, which again split into other trails yet smaller, as if the fleeing band had burst asunder.

This was the Indians' favorite trick, when closely

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pursued. A murmur of vexation arose, while the column, halted, must sit and wait upon the decision of the scouts. The general and his adjutant, followed by Ned the bugler orderly, rode forward to inspect. Wild Bill joined them.

"They're throwing us off, general," he announced, calmly. "I reckon all we can do is to pick one of the middle trails and follow it and trust to luck. Fall Leaf has a trail that we might as well take."

"Very well, sir," agreed General Custer, brusquely. "We must do all that we can, before darkness cuts us short."

"For-r-r'd—march!" On this trail out of the many rode the column; but must pause frequently, while the scouts searched right and left and before, as ever the sign lessened, like a stream at headwaters. At five o'clock it had been reduced to a mere thread, for the Indians who had made it had dropped off, one by one. Signal-smokes could be seen, welling up in east, west and north, as the scattered parties spoke one another. In the dusk must the Seventh Cavalry halt, to make camp, rest the horses, and wait for daylight. The Indians had not been headed, and hearts were heavy. Woe betide the Smoky Hill stage route, and the ranches of central Kansas.

The next day the trail was lost utterly in a dried water-course. Then by night march toward the north star was struck the Smoky Hill River. Beyond was the stage route. Colonel Robert West (who really

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ranked as captain, but was colonel because of his Civil War record) was sent forward with one company to find it. Then in the brightening gray the camp slept; officers and men sprawled out under their blankets. Ned never before had been so tired.

Dreaming, as he slept, of facing Pawnee Killer again and with leveled revolver frightening him into telling where little Mary was, up he popped, startled out of slumber and dream by a quick "Bang!" of carbine and the shrill hail by sentry: "Indians!" The corporal of the guard repeated it.

All the camp was in commotion. Orders issued thick and fast, from where the general was standing, with sabre buckled on and eyes flashing.

"Bring in those stray animals! Have those horses secured, major. One platoon of each company with the horses. The other platoons fall in. Sound the assembly, trumpeter."

A heavy mist hung low along the horizon; but through it could be descried, dimly, almost a mile away, a group of moving horsemen. They seemed to be riding rapidly for the camp. Wild Bill had reported at once to headquarters, and peering through field-glasses, to him the general spoke.

"What do you think of them, Bill?"

"They're up to mischief, I should think," coolly replied Wild Bill, whose eyes were as good as the general's glass. "Act as if they meant to ride us down."

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"Line of skirmishers ahead; main body in reserve," murmured the general, studying them. "By Jove! They're as well disciplined as regular troops! Let 'em come. All we want is a fair fight." These words, "a fair fight," were among General Custer's favorites. "Form line of platoons, adjutant. Have the men take intervals, and lie down, enclosing the camp."

Captain Robbins had been posted upon the knoll whence the sentry had given the alarm. From him came reports that the enemy seemed to number about eighty; presently he reported that the enemy had halted; and next, the enemy had turned and were making off.

"Pshaw!" exclaimed the general, in that brisk voice of his. "Confound them! I was hoping they'd try closer quarters. Look into this, Moylan. Send out a small detail, for a better view of those fellows. Not too far, remember."

Gladly into the saddle sprang the young Captain Hamilton and Lieutenant Tom Custer, and leading their detail raced out at a gallop. The mists were breaking under the rising sun; and it could be seen that the detail were galloping on and on, right into the waiting company before.

"Hamilton must intend to settle the war," quoth Adjutant Moylan.

However, here galloped back again the detail. Pulling up short, Captain Hamilton saluted the general.

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"Colonel West's company, sir, confused in the mist. They mistook our Sibley tents for Indian tipis, and were about to charge us."

"Plucky enough!" commented the general. "But West won't hear the last of this, for some time."

When, toward evening, Colonel West returned, with his weary company, he reported that there was no hope. The Indians had struck the stage line, and raiding right and left had crossed it. Probably all the bands and tribes to the north would be aroused. This was war.

Now the wagons had rolled in. To the bugles the Seventh Cavalry grimly buckled on its sabres, and bridled and saddled.

"Prepare to mount! Mount!"

They mounted.

"By fours, right! For-r-r'd—march!"

Across the valley of the Smoky Hill they soberly jogged, their wagons lumbering in their rear, for the stage route, and the frightened stations. Presently they might turn east, upon the well-worn wagon-trail, to follow it to Fort Hays.

The first two stage stations were silent and abandoned. Along the route was not a sign of life. The advance of the fleeing Cheyennes and Sioux seemed to have swept the country clean. About the deserted appearance of the valley was something ominously quiet. But the third station was occupied.

A little cheer arose from it as the column rode in;

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and a group of stablemen and drivers stood out, to welcome. They were heavily armed, and log stables and station house, under their sod roofs, were tightly closed as if for a siege. At this point four stations had gathered in mutual protection.

"What's the matter here?" demanded the general.

"Matter enough!" spoke one in the group. "Hello, Bill. The Injuns are out. They've crossed the line, goin' north. Several parties of 'em, both Sioux an' Cheyennes. Yes, sir. The lid's off an' the pot's bubblin'. One party had women an' children, but the bucks are in their war paint, an' they're raidin' right an' left. The stages have quit, till things simmer down agin, an' the settlers ought to be warned."

With parting word, and with grave face, issuing his crisp "For-r-r'd—march!" repeated by the bugles, the general pressed on.

On the second day they approached a station which, alas, presented a different aspect. From afar it showed, beside the trail, blackened and smoking and partially razed to the ground.

"Lookout Station," informed Wild Bill.

"Bad work there," quoth the general, abruptly, spurring Custis Lee.

The Delawares arrived first, to nose about, and to stand surveying.

"They've found something," declared Wild Bill.

He, and the general, and Adjutant Moylan galloped

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forward; Ned plugged after; the column followed at a trot.

Bad work, indeed. Much of the buildings was in ashes, still smouldering. A portion of the heavy chinked log walls jutted up charred and ugly. The Delawares were clustered, at one side, on the plain, examining a mass difficult to determine, at a little distance. But a nearer view told. The litter once had been human beings.

"Scalped and burned," said Wild Bill.

Nobody else spoke a word. He and the general and the lieutenant sombrely gazed. The doctor joined, horrified. The Delawares looked from face to face, and waited. Ned stared, and choked.

"The station gang, three of 'em," announced Wild Bill. "Delawares say they were staked down, alive. You can guess the rest."

"Are there any signs who did it—what Indians?" demanded General Custer, sternly.

Fall Leaf, who spoke English, shook his head.

"No arrow, no moccasin, nothin'," he grunted. "Come quick; capture men; scalp, burn, go. Mebbe Cheyenne, mebbe Sioux. Make trail," and he pointed northward.

There was nothing to do but to bury by the stage road the poor mangled fragments. And at dusk the command rode into Fort Hays, fifteen miles.)

VIII

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FORT HAYS was eighty miles west from Fort Harker, and Fort Harker was ninety miles west from Fort Riley; so that now Fort Riley was one hundred and seventy miles distant. Not much of a fort was Hays either, composed, like Harker, of quarters and stables built of logs roughly faced. It was located on the south side of the crooked Big Creek, which between high clay banks flowed down to the Smoky Hill Fork River, fifteen miles south. On the north side of the creek, and up stream a little way, was the new town of Hays City, waiting for the railroad.

Fort Hays was glad to see the column ride down, and pitch its tents nearby. Back from its first campaign was the Seventh Cavalry, and although it had not fired a shot, save the one by the picket, it had many tales to tell to the Fort Hays garrison.

Speedily up sprang like mushrooms the lines of dingy white army canvas. There was a great letter writing spell. Couriers were about to dash away with dispatches for General Hancock, and (what was of more importance) with word to Fort Riley. The general, as usual, had a regular journal to send.

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General Gibbs also hastened off; for in the accumulation of mail awaiting at Fort Hays were letters from Mrs. Custer and Mrs. Gibbs and other women left behind, stating that the negro infantry there had mutinied and were behaving badly. However, General Gibbs was the man to discipline them, and he really ought not to attempt field service, anyway.

Shortly after the Seventh had reared its tents, Scout Bill Cody came riding in, and dismounted at headquarters. The orderly ushered him into the tent, to see the general. When the general and Bill emerged together, the general beckoned to Ned.

"Mr. Cody has brought word, we think, of your sister. Cut Nose the Cheyenne chief is reported to be west of here, with a little white girl he has adopted. He took her with him into Monument Station, and calls her Silver Hair, the station men say."

"Did they keep her, sir?" asked Ned, eagerly. Oh, what if——!

General Custer smiled only sadly, and shook his head.

"No, my boy. The station men could not do that."

"Was your sister a small gal, not more than a child; right pretty, with flax hair?" demanded Scout Bill Cody, searching Ned out of wide steady eyes as piercing as Wild Bill's themselves.

"Yes!" said Ned. "Her name is Mary. She's eight years old."

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"Well," remarked Scout Cody, preparing to mount his horse, "her name is Silver Hair now. Cut Nose has her. At least, he did have her. But she was being well treated, they say. He'd made a sort o' pet of her, the old rascal. The station men tried to buy her from him; but he said no. I'll keep on the lookout for her. Maybe we can get her." And dignified of face, jaunty of poise, off rode Pony Bill Cody, on errand bound. Thereafter Ned saw him frequently. He seemed to rank with Wild Bill Hickok as an important figure at Fort Hays and Hays City.

"Then she's gone again, is she?" faltered Ned, to the general. "Cut Nose still has her, has he, sir?"

"Very likely. Yes, he took her, my lad," answered General Custer, gently. "But here," he added, in abrupt fashion. "She's being well treated, didn't Cody say? She was dressed like an Indian princess. What do you think of that? That's something for which to be thankful. Think of other captive girls and women—how they've suffered. And we'll get her, if it requires all the Seventh Cavalry and the United States treasury. Brace up, boy."

For Ned was crying.

In due time dispatches arrived from General Hancock, who was still on the Arkansas, trying to bring the principal chiefs in to council. When, at dress parade, Lieutenant Moylan as adjutant read to the assembled troops the announcements or orders of the day, "by direction of the commanding general" he

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included among them this special field order, issued from camp near the Arkansas :

II. As a punishment for the bad faith practised by the Cheyennes and Sioux who occupied the Indian village at this place, and as a chastisement for murders and depredations committed since the arrival of the command at this point, by the people of these tribes, the village recently occupied by them, which is now in our hands, will be utterly destroyed.

At that, delivered in Adjutant Moylan's loud voice, from the troops arose a cheer.

"Well, 'tis war now, if 'twasn't before," declared Sergeant Henderson, that evening, within hearing of Ned.

"Why so, Pete?" asked one of the other soldiers.

"'Cordin' to Wild Bill, that village had \$150,000 worth of stuff in it; an' d'ye suppose the Injuns'll stand for the destruction of it all? Now they'll claim we started the war, an' we claim they started it, an' what the end'll be, nobody can say."

"In my opinion," said Sergeant Kennedy, "General Hancock ought never to have let that village-full get away from him. They played with him, and held him off, and then they gave him the slip."

"You're right," agreed Henderson. "An' now we're up agin it, with the Injuns loose in three hundred miles square o' territory, an' we chasin' 'em. An' won't there be a great howl, from the agents an' the traders an' the contractors, because the war is spoilin' their business."

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"Those traders and contractors are responsible for much of this trouble, just the same," asserted the lawyer "rooky" (who now was a veteran). "They do not deliver the agency goods in quality and quantity up to grade."

"That's true," nodded Odell. "Yez ought to see some o' the stuff that gets through to the Injuns. Shoddy cotton for wool; shirts ye can stick your finger through, an' suits o' clothes that won't hang together while the Injun puts 'em on an' that the Government pays the contractor thirteen dollars for!"

"Yes," said Sergeant Henderson. "An' the first thing the Injun does with the pants is to cut out the seat. What do they want o' suits o' clothes, anyway—one suit a year! An' the government thinks to trade 'em this way for their lands an' game an' all that, an' lets 'em get cheated into the bargain."

"Huh!" grunted another member of the circle. "They don't fare any worse'n us fellows. Did you notice that bread served out to us to-night? Talk about hard-tack! Cook says the boxes show it was baked in '61—six years ago! Even a mule won't eat it."

"Sure," answered Odell. "And didn't wan o' the boxes o' salt beef opened at the commissary contain a big stone, to make it weigh more!"

General Hancock passed through back from the south. Then followed another event. This was the

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arrival of the great General Sherman, who was commander of the whole Military Division of the Missouri, whereas General Hancock was commander only of the Department of the Missouri, in it. Of course everybody knew of General William Tecumseh Sherman, the man who had "marched to the sea." And with General Sherman came, in the same ambulance from Fort Harker, the end of the railroad, Mrs. Custer and Miss Diana!

General Sherman proved to be just like his picture, which Ned had seen several times: a tall spare man, slightly stooped, with high forehead, and long severe face, crisp full beard of russet color, and blue eyes. "Brass mounted," some of the soldiers called him; and the veterans referred to him affectionately as "Old Bill." When he smiled he was very pleasant.

The post and the camp turned out in a review to do him honor. However, the best sight, to Ned, was the way in which, when the ambulance stopped at the tent and Eliza's black face peered out all agrin, with a whoop the general rushed up and swung the happy Mrs. Custer to him. How they chattered!

The general busied himself making Mrs. Custer and the rest of the household comfortable in special new tents, on Big Creek, nearer the fort. For the Seventh Cavalry was ordered out again. Two companies were left at Hays; the six others, 350 men and twenty wagons, marched forth, into the north.

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Wild Bill remained behind to carry forward dispatches when some were ready. Young Bill Cody was held to serve as scout for other cavalry. But when the Seventh started Ned witnessed riding ahead as guide, another young man, of fair complexion and handsome features and easy seat. His name was Comstock—Will Comstock. Ah, yes; and a splendid young scout he was, too, equal to the best; could speak Sioux and Cheyenne and some Arapaho, and talk the sign language, and knew every trail and water course. See that revolver he wears? Pearl-handled and silver-mounted! One of the finest revolvers on the plains. He thinks a heap of it, too, does Will Comstock.

Thus by ears and by eyes did Ned learn the character of the new guide.

The march was to be from Fort Hays and the valley of the Smoky Hill in central Kansas north across the broad plains country 250 miles to Fort McPherson on the Platte River in southwestern Nebraska. But although through the center of this country flowed down the Republican River, on whose upper waters 1000 hostile Sioux and Cheyennes were rumored to be lurking, without a fight the Seventh Cavalry arrived at Fort McPherson, named for General John McPherson, once commander of the Army of Tennessee.

Fort McPherson, in the Department of the Platte, was only a handful of cedar-log cabins, helping to guard the Overland Trail and the new Union Pacific

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Railroad, as in the south Fort Harker, Hays, and all guarded the Smoky Hill trail and the new Kansas Pacific Railroad. It was garrisoned by two troops of the Second Cavalry.

Ahead of the Seventh Cavalry had arrived, by railroad as far as McPherson, and thence by stage, General Sherman. He now was at Fort Sedgwick, west, near to Julesburg of northeastern Colorado Territory.

General Custer sent Lieutenant Moylan ahead into the post, with dispatches for General Sherman, and to get any dispatches that might be waiting. Lieutenant Moylan returned, meeting the column as it prepared to make temporary camp. The adjutant had word.

"Pawnee Killer and some of his Sioux are encamped about ten miles out, general," he announced. "A post scout just brought in the news."

"What are they doing?"

"Nothing, I understand. They arrived about the same time we did. They pretend to be peaceful."

"We'd better find out, then," declared the general. "What do you think, Comstock? Shall we try a conference?"

"Corral the whole outfit, gentlemen, while you have the chance, is *my* guess," answered Scout Will Comstock.

"Well, I can't adopt any harsh measures without orders," replied the general. "We've got to encourage the Indians to be friendly."

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"All right," said Comstock, rather gloomily. "I s'pose 'cordin' to those thar peace people out East, soldiers an' everybody ought to wait an' let the Injuns shoot fust; an' then if they miss, give 'em another try, so as to keep 'em amused!"

General Custer made no answer; but by the little smile under his tawny moustache he seemed to agree with Comstock's disgusted opinion.

Word was sent to Pawnee Killer to come into camp, for a talk; and that afternoon in he came. But the talk amounted to nothing. Soon was it seen that the suave and crafty Sioux intended to find out what the soldiers were up to, and not to tell what he was up to. General Custer said to him that he must move his people in near to the forts, so that they would not be mistaken for hostiles. Pawnee Killer blandly replied that he would, as fast as he could. In order to please the visitors the general directed that they be given sugar and coffee; and they rode away again.

None of the men believed what Pawnee Killer had said; and some rather thought that the general had been foolish to treat him so well, and let him think that he was hoodwinking the white chief. Upon the arrival, again, of General Sherman, from Sedgwick, the Seventh was ordered south to the Forks of the Republican, to find Pawnee Killer's village.

General Sherman rode with General Custer for fifteen miles, talking matters over with him. Ned,

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behind, could hear much of the conversation, and it showed matters to be considered serious. The Sioux of the north were sending warriors down to join with the Sioux and Cheyennes of the south; the Arapahos were uneasy, although Little Raven and Black Kettle were promising to hold them steady; a friendly band of Brulé or Burnt Thigh Sioux under Chief Spotted Tail had been forced to move from the Republican Forks north across the Platte at Julesberg—because, said Spotted Tail, his young warriors were getting excited; and down on the Arkansas, Satanta, wearing the major-general uniform that had been given him, had driven off the horse-herd from Fort Dodge itself! Stage stations had been burned on the Platte River route—yes, not far from Fort McPherson; and on the Smoky Hill route. Union Pacific and Kansas Pacific Railroad surveying parties had been attacked. On the Republican and other settled streams ranches had been pillaged. It looked as though a real Indian war was brewing.

By Eastern people the army on the plains was being much criticized. Some of these people depended upon the Indian trade for business; but some thought that the Indian was abused. It did not seem right to them that General Hancock had destroyed the village on Pawnee Fork. The Indians, said these people through the newspapers and in speeches, should be left to the control of the agencies. The soldiers wished only fighting.

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However, General Sherman appeared to be little influenced by the criticisms of the Eastern peace party; although he did say, rather angrily:

"I tell you, Custer, there'll be no peace on the plains until the Indians are so subdued that they can be controlled by constables instead of soldiers. Meantime the War Department ought to have complete charge of the tribes. Now while we're doing the fighting at one end of the line to enforce our terms, the civil agents make a treaty at the other end, on different terms. Then the treaty is broken and the work must be done all over again. And if the agents and the traders are to be permitted to supply the savages with arms, in defiance of the orders of the military, I believe in withdrawing every soldier from the district and letting the civil authorities settle affairs. We have a hard enough task, without being called upon to face weapons furnished by our own government."

All peaceful was that rolling plains country, during the four days' march of seventy-five miles down to the Forks of the Republican. From the crest of each rise was to be seen the same vista before as behind: the grasses, the June flowers, the willows and cottonwoods, the sandstone uplifts, the long swells, with the only moving creatures the elk, the antelope, the buffalo, the black-tail deer, the wolf, rabbit and prairie dog.

The Forks of the Republican also seemed deserted;

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but who might tell here, as on the march, what Indian heads were peering from ravines, over hillocks, or through bushes, spying upon the horses, the wagons and the blue-bloused men.

North to Fort Sedgwick, seventy-five miles, were sent with dispatches for General Sherman, Major Joel Elliott and picked escort of ten men. South to Fort Wallace, eighty miles, was sent for supplies a wagon-train under command of Lieutenant (colonel, they called him) William Cook and Lieutenant Samuel Robbins. Major West was escort. By Colonel Cook went a letter to Mrs. Custer, telling her that she might come back with him, by way of Fort Wallace, to the camp.

Some of the men criticised this as not wise in the general, not safe for Mrs. Custer. Indians surely were about, and they would take big chances to make a white woman captive. Anybody who knew Mrs. Custer, also knew that she would come. Fire, water or savages would not stop her from trying to join the general. So there was dubious shaking of heads, when the news leaked out.

Yes, the Indians were watching. That was soon to be shown. However, calm and sweet was the twilight. Gradually the western glow faded, while busily grazed the horses and mules. The men lounged about, and contentedly smoked and chatted. To and fro paced the sentries. The stream rippled. Over it and

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over the wide prairie swooped low the night-hawks. Scarcely a coyote barked. Even the general's dogs found nothing to do.

At dusk the animals were brought in close and tethered along the picket ropes. Stable guards were stationed for them. At half-past eight Ned blew the long sweet call of "Taps." The notes floated musically over the wide expanse. Every light was extinguished; and amidst the loneliness the camp of the Seventh Cavalry, United States Army, lay down to sleep. The white tents glimmered; the horses and mules snorted; the sentinels paced their beats.

In his tent beside the adjutant's Ned was wakened in a jump. It seemed that he had just fallen asleep—but the interior of the tent was gray; dawn was at hand. The smart crack of a carbine was echoing in his ears—and now he heard a sharp, excited voice:

"They're here!" That was Lieutenant Custer, the general's brother, rushing past, warning the general. He was officer of the day. And out rang a perfect volley of shots, and a great peal of shrill, savage whoops.

Grabbing bugle and belt Ned dived from his tent. He was in time to witness the front of the general's tent burst open, like a paper bag, and General Custer come bolting through. The general wore a bright red flannel night-gown—but he carried in his hand his Spencer rifle. He was ready for business,

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On ran the general, toward the spot of the firing and the shouting. He was no quicker than his men; they streamed from their tents, and clad in shirts and drawers, but bearing cartridge-belts and carbines, they rallied to the defence. Scarcely any orders were necessary, although Lieutenant Tom Custer and all the officers were there to give them. The voice of the general rose high, urging, commanding, cheering. His red flannel night-shirt flamed hither and thither; his long bright locks tossed like a mane; he wore no shoes or stockings. Ned saw him in a new guise: Old Curly, the fighting Chief with the Yellow Hair.

The carbines crackled, as in irregular line the troopers, lying or kneeling, rapidly fired. Beyond, in the thin morning, the Indians dashed swiftly back and forth. From the soldiers issued jeers and threats and challenges, as well as lead.

"I got one! I got one!" yelled the lawyer recruit. "No; I got two! There goes another off his horse!"

"Shut up!" growled Sergeant Henderson. "Do you think that every time you fire you knock over an Injun? They only hang on the far side of their horses, lad!"

That was so. At the discharges from the carbines whole squads of the scampering reds seemed to be swept from their saddles; when, no, there they were, again, upright, and gesturing derision! It was enough

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to fool any white man, fighting them for his first time. But many were the jokes leveled at the recruits, by the veterans in the firing-line.

However, the Indians didn't succeed. There must have been two or three hundred of them, attacking, while about fifty tried for the camp horses. They had shot the picket. He was lying wounded. He would have been scalped if his comrades had not run out and dragged him in. After a few volleys from the Spencers of the soldiers the red enemy retreated. They could be seen gathered about a mile away, in council.

IX

DANGER ON EVERY SIDE

It could be seen that General Custer was thoroughly indignant. But first he must ask about the wounded picket, who proved to be badly hurt, not fatally. Then he must change his night-gown for a more practical field costume. When he emerged from his tent, he was again ready for business.

"I'd like to know who those fellows are, and what they mean," he denounced, furiously, among his officers. "We've done nothing, to make them attack us. Send out an interpreter, Moylan, and ask for a parley."

The Indians were still collected, upon their ponies, about a mile distant. Their figures showed black in the dawn brightening across the vast, boundless prairie. Where in the far east prairie met sky was a strip of glowing pink.

The interpreter, a squaw-man from Fort McPherson, with a Sioux wife, rode out and on the river bank made circles with his horse. This signalled: "We want to talk." One of the Indians answered with the same sign, and a part of them came forward.

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"Tell them that seven of us will meet seven of them, at the river, for a talk," directed the general to the interpreter.

Riding forward again the interpreter cried across the space to the Indians, and the matter was quickly arranged.

"Captain Hamilton, you will assume command here," directed the general. "Keep the men under arms, and be ready to move forward to us at the first signal by the trumpeter. Dr. Coates, you'd better come along with the rest of us; you're anxious to know the Indians. Moylan, Thompson, Tom Custer, Yates, Johnson. Change your revolvers from your holsters to your belts, gentlemen. Then you can get at them, in case of need. Those fellows (and he jerked his head toward the Indians) are not to be trusted, evidently."

They rode away, Ned of course accompanying. From the opposite direction were approaching to meet them the seven chiefs. The river was the conference point, for it lay about in the middle between the two parties. Just before reaching it the general halted, and dismounted. Dismounted all except Ned.

"Hold these horses, orderly," instructed the general, to Ned; "and watch sharp. Watch the Indians, especially, and at the least trouble or any sign of treachery you blow the 'advance.'"

"Yes, sir," replied Ned.

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Surrounded by the seven horses he sat, their lines in his hands, while the general and the other officers proceeded on, down to the edge of the water.

The banks on this side were smooth and grassy; on the other they were cut by arroyos or ravines and grown with willows. So the officers waited, for the Indians to cross to the open side. The chiefs also dismounted, and began to take off their leggins, to wade. Through the shallow current they boldly splashed, holding high their moccasins and guns, out of the wet.

"Huh!" from his horse suddenly ejaculated Ned, scarce believing his eyes. For the leading chief was Pawnee Killer himself!

But Pawnee Killer did not appear at all abashed, nor confused by the fact that after having visited the general in camp at Fort McPherson and having promised to be peaceable, he had tried here to steal the column's horses and to rush the camp.

"How?" he grunted, shaking hands with the officers. 'And "How?" grunted in turn all his squad.

They were well armed. Usually in a conference weapons are left behind; but this was a conference with the weapons ready. Ned sat intent, gazing hard, to catch every movement of the seven chiefs and also of the main party, at the distance. He could not hear much of what was being said. He learned afterward that the general did not say anything about the attack

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on the camp, but wanted to know about the village; and that Pawnee Killer did not say anything about the village, but wanted to know where the cavalry were going. And neither side found out much about the other!

While Ned was peering, and waiting, alert, he saw another Indian suddenly step forth from among the willows, and cross as had the chiefs. This was a younger Indian, fully armed. He shook hands all around, saying "How?" Scarcely had he finished, and the talk was continuing, when yet another Indian crossed, in exactly the same manner.

Ned fidgeted. That was a great scheme: for the Sioux warriors to steal up, through the ravines and the willows, and one by one cross. Pawnee Killer could not think very highly of General Custer's smartness, if he supposed that these additions, one at a time, were not noticed. Because the general was young and new to Indian fighting, and had been lied to, and still was being deceived, apparently, Pawnee Killer must consider that he did not amount to much.

Presently two more Indians had crossed, so that now there were eleven, to the seven whites. Ned's heart beat rapidly. The situation was getting serious. He shifted the lines of the horses, so as to use his right hand to raise the bugle to his lips. The "Advance" repeated itself over and over in his brain. But listen! General Custer's voice rose emphatic.



" TELL THIS CHIEF THAT IF ANOTHER MAN OF HIS CROSSES THE RIVER
MY MEN WILL ADVANCE "

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"Tell this chief that if another man of his crosses the river, my men will all advance ready to fight. Tell him that bugler is watching, ready to blow the signal."

When this was translated to Pawnee Killer (who had understood by the tone) he made some sort of a reply, but he waved his hand at his party, signing them to stay back. He had found out that the young white chief with the yellow hair was not such a fool, after all.

Then the conference broke up. As the general and the other officers started away, Pawnee Killer stretched out his hand, demanding something. The general spoke abruptly:

"No. I should say not. Not until he moves his village in close to a post, as he promised." And returned to mount his horse, the general still was grumbling, half enraged, half amused. "Sugar, coffee and ammunition! He's the most consummate rascal I ever met. He wants us to feed him so that he can follow us, and equip him so that he can kill us. He ought to have saved some of the ammunition that he used on us so recklessly this morning!"

Pawnee Killer and his chiefs and warriors had gone galloping off, and soon the whole party were retreating across the plains. General Custer angrily ordered "Boots and Saddles," for a pursuit, to see where the village lay. But Pawnee Killer was again too cunning for the yellow haired general. Away went

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the Sioux, racing freely; after them pressed the cavalry, the general in the lead. Had all the cavalry horses been like Phil Sheridan the troops might at least have kept the Indians in sight; as it was, the lightly laden ponies and their easy riders dwindled and dwindled, and soon disappeared in the horizon. So the cavalry must quit, before getting too far from camp.

Now more Indians were sighted, in another direction.

"My compliments to Captain Hamilton, and tell him to take his troop and see what those other fellows are up to," ordered the general, promptly, to Adjutant Moylan.

Away gladly trotted the troop of young Captain Hamilton, whose first lieutenant was Colonel Tom Custer. With two such officers, this was a crack troop of fighters. Besides, there went the active Doctor Coates, also. The general smiled.

"The doctor's bound to get as close to the Indians as he can. First thing we know he'll join a tribe! Now," he added, gravely, his face showing anxious lines, "I wish we knew that Elliot was all right, and was getting through to Sedgwick. There's the chance that the Indians don't know he's gone. His escort is so small he can travel fast. That's one comfort. Cook and Robbins can take care of themselves, pretty well, as long as their escort stays together."

Captain Hamilton's troop had been swallowed up

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among the swales to the north; and while the general and his staff discussed ways and means, many eyes were directed northward, and many ears were strained, to catch any token of a fight or of further pursuit.

Nothing came back, drifting in from the northward. The general and the adjutant and other officers talked, and the men sat more at ease, and the minutes passed. The sun was high in the east; a strong breeze blew across the plains, waving the longer grasses. Then, on a sudden, there was thud of rapid hoofs, a panting and a snorting, and almost before anybody could turn about, into the camp had rushed, at top speed of his horse, Doctor Coates. Scarcely drawing rein he fell off, rather than dismounted, and lay gasping, trying to speak.

To him rushed officers and men.

“What’s the matter, doctor?”

“Hurt?”

“Speak, man!”

“Can’t you talk?”

“Where’s Hamilton?”

“Attacked?”

The doctor nodded violently.

“Boots and saddles, there!” ordered the general, sharply. “Hurry, men!”

Smartly Ned blew the call. The men ran hither, thither, tugging their horses into line. Now the doctor was able to speak.

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“Indians! Over yonder! Got him—surrounded. Almost got me—too.”

“How far?”

“About five miles.”

The general's voice pealed louder than Ned's trumpet.

“Prepare to mount—mount! Fours right, trot—march!”

Out from camp sallied, at brisk trot, the remnants of the squadrons, to the rescue of Captain Hamilton and Lieutenant Tom Custer and their troop. The doctor, on his blown horse, acted as guide.

There was no sound of firing; but as the column pushed on, trying to make best speed and yet save strength for the fight, the doctor explained.

“Indians tolled us on, then separated. Hamilton took after one party, Tom after other. I went with Tom, until I dropped out at one side, somehow, while I was looking about. Next thing I knew I was lost. Pretty soon I heard a lot of firing, and when I reconnoitered I saw Hamilton's detachment, only half a mile away, with Indians all around them. Thought I'd ride right through and help him; but the Indians saw me first, and away they came, six or eight of 'em, making for me. Almost got me, too, I tell you! Closed up within arrow range, and if my horse hadn't been as frightened as I was, and if camp hadn't appeared just when it did, my scalp would have been

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gone. I'm afraid Hamilton is in a bad box. They outnumbered him, and had plenty of ammunition."

"Tom may join him."

"Yes, if Tom isn't in the same fix. Country is full of Indians, I believe."

Two of the five miles had been put behind. It was scarce to be expected that carbine shots could yet be heard; but nevertheless the silence seemed ominous, as if the battle might be over; and with victory to which side?

Trot, trot; jingle, jingle; across the grassy plain, with every man leaning forward in his saddle, as if to get there sooner. Then Fall Leaf, the Delaware, signaled back, from a little rise: "People in sight." The general and Adjutant Moylan clapped their glasses to their eyes, and forthwith the general threw up his gauntleted hand in gesture of relief.

"There they come," he said. "Good! I see the troop guidon."

Captain Hamilton's troop it was, with all the men uninjured, and with only one horse wounded. Captain Hamilton reported that he had killed two warriors and had driven the other Indians away, without any assistance from Lieutenant Tom Custer. Lieutenant Tom had pursued the second knot of Indians, until after they had drawn him far enough they had given him the slip. These Sioux were clever.

Blood had been shed. This was war. The Indians now would be hot for revenge. And Major Elliot

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was still out, and so was the wagon train for Fort Wallace. Returning with the wagon-train would come Mrs. Custer. That was now the main thought in the camp. The Indians surely would not miss a chance at such a prize as wagons of supplies. Why had the general been so foolish as to send for Mrs. Custer, when it was well known that Indians were abroad?

The general grew haggard all in an hour. Before night he had sent a squadron under command of Major (who was a lieutenant-colonel) Myers, to push right through and meet the train.

Then there was nothing to do but to wait. Three days passed, and in rode the little party of Major Elliot, with the dispatches from Fort Sedgwick. On the next day, hurrah! Here approached, weaving across the plain like a huge snake, the white-topped army wagons and the escort troops.

Out rode the general, to meet them; and particularly to meet Mrs. Custer. The wagons all were there—twenty of them; the column of troops looked intact; but from the wagons or from horse no handkerchief waved greeting, and Ned, on Buckie thudding along behind the general, felt a sudden cold chill. What if anything had happened to the sweet Mrs. Custer, or to Diana of the dancing curls?

Major (who was also colonel) West was in command of the column, for he was the senior officer.

"All right, colonel?" demanded the general, his eyes roving anxiously along the winding line.

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"All right, general. But we had quite a brush. That is, Cook and Robbins did. Myers and I arrived just in time to see the enemy disappear."

"Mrs. Custer here?" queried the general, sharply.

"No, general. She didn't leave Hays, fortunately. Cook can tell you about it."

Didn't leave Hays! The general seemed to heave a great sigh of relief. Camp and trail were no places for a white woman, even so plucky a one as Mrs. Custer, or as pretty Diana. He dashed along the column, seeking Lieutenant Cook.

"Well, Cook! Had a fight, I hear."

"Yes, sir. They attacked us pretty severely, on our way out from Wallace, before West and Myers joined us. We saw them coming, and formed with the men on foot and the wagons and horses in the middle. Then we kept right on moving forward, but they circled us savagely. There were between six and seven hundred of them, weren't there, Comstock?"

"Fully so," agreed Scout Will Comstock, who was riding near. "But there ain't as many now, gen'ral. We toppled five of 'em for keeps, an' there's more red hides that's got troublesome holes in 'em. But it looked for a time as though our scalps was goin' to pay. Six or seven hundred Injuns warn't goin' to let fifty men stop 'em from gettin' at the sugar an' coffee in those wagons."

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"Mrs. Custer didn't start, then?" asked the general, of Lieutenant Cook.

"No, sir. Thank God she didn't. She was ready to, had her baggage tied up, and General Hancock forbade. I don't think she liked that very well. I have a letter for you from her."

General Custer took the letter, and read it in the saddle.

From the talk it appeared that the wagon-train had fought hard and well, for three hours. The wagons were scarred with bullets; in them were several wounded men; and throughout the column were a number of wounded horses and mules. Ned heard a conversation between Lieutenant Cook and another officer, that showed how serious had been the situation.

"Would you have done it, Cook?" asked the officer, keenly.

Lieutenant Cook firmly nodded.

"I should. When the attack developed I said to myself, at once: 'If Mrs. Custer were here, in my charge, the first thing I must do would be to ride to her ambulance and mercifully shoot her. That is my solemn promise to the general.'"

"Whew!" sighed the other officer, gravely. "That would be horrible. But not so horrible," he added, "as to let her or any other white woman fall alive into the hands of the Indians."

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"We promised the general, in regard to Mrs. Custer," said the lieutenant. "He made us promise, and he knows that we intended to keep our word."

"You'd have waited, a little?" pursued the officer. Lieutenant Cook shook his head.

"No, sir. Not a moment. I love Mrs. Custer like a sister; and the thought that she was dependent on me, and helpless in the ambulance, would have driven me distracted. I should have obeyed orders—and you know what they are. Then I should have fought to the last, and should not have expected to face the general. My course, first and last, was clear. But it didn't come necessary."

A Canadian was Lieutenant William Cook, with long black side-whiskers and handsome kindly face. He had served through the Civil War, and was accounted one of the best officers in the Seventh. By reason of his birth they called him "Queen's Own" Cook.

X

SAD NEWS FOR THE ARMY BLUE

THE soldiers who had fought in the wagon-train swaggered through the camp, and talked much like veterans. The camp, also, had its tales to tell, of attack and scalps and victory. So that the Seventh Cavalry had made a start on the battle-roll to be emblazoned on their standards.

Major Elliott had brought orders from General Sherman to march north again, toward the Platte. The Platte was struck near Riverside stage station, in Colorado fifty miles west from Fort Sedgwick. No Indians had been sighted ; but Indians were still around, for the very evening before the arrival of the Seventh at Riverside the hostiles had attacked the next station west, and had killed three men.

But this was not all. Evidently something else had occurred. Upon reading his dispatches from General Sherman, General Custer immediately had sent out for his officers, and was holding a consultation, at his tent. The discussion easily reached the ears of Ned, standing at his post, ready for orders from the general or Adjutant Moylan.

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Kidder—a Lieutenant Lyman S. Kidder, Second Cavalry, had been sent out from Fort Sedgwick, with dispatches for the Seventh Cavalry camp at the Forks of the Republican. He had only ten men, he ought to have arrived there or else have overtaken the column before it reached the Platte. But he had not been sighted. He was a young officer, this was his first scout. What had happened to him?

Red Bead, a friendly Sioux chief, was his guide, so he could not have lost his way; but upon such a long ride ten men were altogether too few, when Indians by the hundreds infested the whole district.

Speedily the news spread through the ranks. There was shaking of heads. In the opinion of the older sergeants, a great error had been committed.

“My idea is,” voiced Henderson, who was as level-headed as anybody, “that this young left’nant may have struck our camp; but if he did, like as not he took the wagon trail on south’rd, thinkin’ it was our trail. In that case, he’ll run into that same gang o’ reds who attacked the train ’twixt the Republican and Wallace, an’ they’ll wipe him out; they’ll wipe him out. It was a crime to send him on the scout with scarce a dozen, all told, in his party. An’ him new to the business, too. The time has come when the Army ought to know it can’t fight Injuns that way. They’re better armed than we are, an’ they’re mighty smart, boys.”

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The suggestion put forth by Henderson seemed to be that of the council of officers also.

More bad news was received. Cholera had broken out at Forts Wallace and Hays, and scurvy on account of the bad rations.

Therefore when over the wire the Kidder dispatches were repeated, ordering the column to return to Wallace, very ready was the general to go. Lieutenant Kidder might be found, and Mrs. Custer might be removed to safer quarters. So camp was broken at daylight.

During the march a sharp lookout was maintained for sign of the missing Second Cavalry detachment; but none appeared.

"What's your opinion now, Comstock?" queried again the general, anxiously, as at the head of the column, where rode he and Adjutant Moylan and Will Comstock, he scanned the ground and the horizon. Will Comstock only shook his head.

"I'm not sayin', gen'ral," finally he replied. "It's 'arly yet to make a guess. He may be all right—an' agin he may *not*."

The Forks of the Republican came into sight; and the former camping place. Here were the tracks of the Seventh, and from here proceeded the trail made by the wagon-train, to Fort Wallace. But trace of Lieutenant Kidder, or of any new horsemen, could not be found, even by the Delawares searching so keenly.

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About the headquarters camp-fire, that night, Scout Will Comstock at last did speak, more definitely, but still dubiously. And the officers listened eagerly.

"Well, *gentle-men*," drawled Comstock, "before a man kin form any ijee as to how this thing is likely to end, thar are several things he ort to be acquainted with. For instance, now, no man need tell me any p'int about Injuns. Ef I know anything, it's Injuns. I know jest how they'll do anything an' when they'll take to do it; but that don't settle this question, an' I'll tell you why. Thar's more'n jest Injuns consarned in the matter. Ef I knowed this young lootenint—I mean Lootenint Kidder—ef I knowed what for sort of a man he is, I could tell you mighty near to a sartinty what he did an' whar he went; for you see Injun huntin' an' Injun fightin' is a trade all by itself, an' like any other bizness a man has to know what he's about. I have lots of *confidence* in the fightin' sense of Red Bead the Sioux chief, who is guidin' the lootenint an' his men, an' ef that Injun kin have his own way thar's a fair show for his guidin' 'em through all right. But is this lootenint the kind of a man who is willin' to take advice, even ef it does come from an Injun? My experience with you army folks has allus been that the youngsters among ye think they know the most, an' this is partic'larly true ef they have jest come from West P'int. Ef some of them young fellers knowed half as much as they b'lieve they know, you couldn't tell 'em

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nothin'. As to rale book-l'arnin', why, I s'pose they've got it all; but the fact of the matter is, they couldn't tell the dif'rence 'twixt the trail of a war party an' one made by a huntin' party to save their necks. Half of 'em when they fust come here can't tell a squaw from a buck, jest 'cause both ride astraddle; but they soon l'arn. I'm told this lootenint we're talkin' about is a new-comer, an' that this is his fust scout. Ef that be the case, it puts a mighty onsartin look on the whole bus'ness, an' twixt you and me, *gentle-men*, he'll be mighty lucky ef he gets through all right. Tomorrer we strike the Wallace trail, an' I kin mighty soon tell ef he has gone that way."

This speech, so lengthy for the usually silent Will Comstock, made everybody feel more anxious than ever. Evidently the scout had his great fears, which he had tried to keep to himself.

Therefore, with dawn all were alert to strike the wagon-trail to Fort Wallace. Comstock and the Delawares forged ahead, to examine it first before the cavalry column should mark it up. The general and his staff urged forward, to get the report.

"Well, Comstock. Have they passed?" queried the general, reining short.

Comstock had been on foot, peering closely. The Delawares and he seemed to have agreed, for now he remounted.

"Yes, sir. They've gone toward Wallace, sure," he said, soberly. "They've mistook this here trail

SAD DAYS FOR THE ARMY BLUE

for the main trail of the column. The trail shows that twelve American horses, shod all 'round, have lately passed at a walk, in direction of the fort. When they come by this p'int they were all right, 'cause their hosses were movin' along easy, an' there are no pony tracks behind 'em, as would be the case ef Injuns had got an eye on 'em." Comstock rubbed his cheek, dubiously. "I mought as well say that in *my* opinion, gentle-men, it'll be astonishin' ef that lootenint an' his lay-out gets into the fort without a scrimmage. He may, but *ef* he does, it'll be a scratch ef ever thar was one, an' I'll lose my *confidence* in Injuns."

That sounded bad. It was only two days' march to the fort, but what would those two days uncover?

"We'll soon know, then," spoke the general. "Let us hope that if they did reach the fort, they didn't attempt to return and hunt us further, and that we'll find them there. You and the Delawares watch close, Will, to catch any sign of their having left the trail, at either side."

Comstock nodded.

Still the plains stretched lonely and unbroken, with never a sight of moving figure save occasional rabbit or wolf. Then, toward noon, at last something did appear—a white object, dotting the trail a mile in advance. A skeleton? A tent? A patch of alkali? At every guess Comstock, gazing, shook his head; and even the Delawares were mystified.

But General Custer never delayed.

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"Come on," he bade. "Let's look into that." And away he galloped, with Adjutant Moylan and Major Elliot and Major West and a couple of other officers, the scouts, and Ned faithfully following. Where went the general, went he, the orderly.

"It's a hoss! A' dead hoss, gentle-men," pronounced Comstock, before they were more than half way. The general did not pause to level his glasses again; Comstock's word was enough.

Sure enough, a horse it was; a white horse, lying stiff and bloody in the trail, with a bullet-hole through its head.

"A cavalry horse," exclaimed the general, quickly. "There's the U. S. on its shoulder, and saddle marks on its back."

"It's out of the Second Cavalry, too, general," added Major Elliot. "When I was at Sedgwick I noticed a full company mounted on white horses."

"Do you see any Indian sign, Comstock?—As to who did this? Or whether there's been a fight?" demanded the general.

Scout Comstock and the Delawares examined the carcass, and the ground around-about, for token of arrow or cartridge-shells or pony tracks; but they could find nothing. The horse had been shot and stripped; that was all.

"Then there's the chance, isn't there," proposed Major Elliot, "that the animal may have dropped

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out, and that they shot him and took his saddle and bridle to prevent the Indians making use of him?"

"We must hope so," answered the general.

Yes, they all hoped so; but presently, on the march, Comstock spoke, from where he was skirting the wagon-trail.

"There's somethin' wrong, sure, gen'ral. Now we're diskivverin' signs that talk. This here party we're follerin' has quickened up an' spread out more irregular, so they're on both sides the trail, as well as in it."

"And there's another dead horse, isn't it?" directed Major Elliot.

Yes, a second dead white horse awaited, just ahead; shot in the trail, and stripped, like the first.

"Pony tracks, too, gentle-men," announced Comstock, the moment that he scanned the ground about. "It's Injuns. I knowed it. An' the very wust place for attack, too. Nothin' but level ground, whar they kin circle an' shoot an' t'other party can't find shelter, to make a stand. Shod hosses are movin' at a full gallop, now; so are ponies. This lootenint an' his men are ridin' hard for kivver. That's plain."

"Would they make it, do you think?"

"Wall," said Comstock, again dubious, "it's doubtful. Tryin' to run away from a big party of Injuns, in open country, is dangerous matter—'specially if you depend on speed alone. I take it this lootenint was ridin' an' not fightin'; an' fust thing he'll

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know he'll be surrounded, with his hosses all tuckered out."

The pony tracks extended far on either side of the trail, showing that the Indians had been in large numbers. However, no more dead horses were found, nor any other sign of damage; and Ned began to hope, again, that the lieutenant and his men had escaped, after all. Nevertheless, it was still forty miles to Fort Wallace; a long, long way in a ride for life.

Suddenly the level country dropped away into a wide valley, through which flowed a creek marked by a border of willows and high weeds. No doubt this sight had cheered the fleeing lieutenant and his party; for in the willows they might make a stand.

"That's Beaver Creek, gentle-men," informed Comstock. "Whar the trail crosses we're liable to find out a good deal of what we don't yit know. But there's no fightin' goin' on down there now; that's sartin."

No; no sound of battle rose to the valley's rim; and neither did any smoke of camp or of signal up-well. All was silence; utter silence. As they rode down the slope, and the stream itself was yet a mile away, General Custer pointed, without speaking. Off to the left, and ahead, several black buzzards were circling lazily and low.

"Whew!" exclaimed Comstock. "Smell it? I reckon, gentle-men, that tells the story. Let's go over there."

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The air was thick with rank odor of decaying flesh. General Custer and his staff turned aside, following the scouts, to search for the source. It might be only dead buffalo; but probably it was——?

The brush and grass were high; at the edge Ned halted; he would let the others enter; he was a soldier, but he would rather stay where he had stopped. They did not require him; of course they didn't. The Delawares, and Will Comstock, and the officers, rode back and forth. It was only after a long time that, on a sudden, General Jackson, Fall Leaf's nephew, gave a loud shout; and instantly he was off his horse and stooping.

He had found something.

The general and all the officers and scouts hastened to him. The general beckoned for the men to come. Even Ned pushed forward; he could not help himself, for he feared to see and yet he wanted to see.

There they lay, all, white horses and white men and one red man; what was left of them after the enemy had taken vengeance. It was not a peaceful sight, for the bodies bristled with arrows, shot in and left, and knife and tomahawk had cruelly gashed. But there were many empty cartridge shells, showing that Lieutenant Kidder and his little command had fought desperately and bravely.

"Surrounded an' cut off. I knowed they'd be," declared Comstock. "The Injuns got here fust, like

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as not. Sioux. Know why? 'Cause while they scalped Red Bead they didn't take his scalp away. There 'tis, lying beside him. It's agin Injun rules to bear off scalp of one of their own tribe. So these must have been Sioux, same as Red Bead. Pawnee Killer's band, like as not."

That terrible Pawnee Killer!

"Which is the lieutenant, I wonder?" mused the general. "Have you found any marks that tell, Comstock?"

"Not a one. No, sir; I doubt if even his own mother could pick him out."

That was so. Only Red Bead could be recognized. All the others were stripped of their clothing, and were so hacked about the face that scarcely a feature was left. Fall Leaf the Delaware bent and pointed at something. It was a black-and-white checked collar-band still encircling a neck. That was all.

After a mournful shuddering survey of the bloody field, the soldiers of the Seventh could only dig a trench and gently place therein these remains of young officer, his brave men, and his faithful Sioux guide.

XI

GRIM DAYS ALONG THE TRAIL

WHEN on the third day into the outskirts of Fort Wallace rode with their melancholy news the returning column, they found the little post hard-put. Sacks of sand had been piled up for additional barricades; mounds of earth betokened dug-outs. Twice the Indians had attacked it. Yes, the Cheyennes under Chief Roman Nose had insultingly cantered up, and when boldly had out-charged the two small companies of the Seventh, led by Captain (Colonel) Alfred Barnitz, they were met by a counter-charge from the Indians. Only after a hand-to-hand fight were Roman Nose's warriors at last driven off. Sergeant Anderson thought that he had wounded Roman Nose. Half a dozen negro soldiers, on out-post picket duty, had dashed forward, waiting no orders, in a wagon, to help the cavalry; and the fort officers were loud in their praise of the act.

So poor little Fort Wallace, alone amidst the burning or freezing plains, last post of the line to protect the road to Denver, was in sore straits.

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The telegraph was two hundred miles east, at Fort Harker; even the stages had stopped running, save at long intervals, in pairs, when a guard of soldiers could be furnished; dispatches and supplies had been interrupted. Now the bad rations were rapidly growing worse, and scurvy and cholera were aiding the Indians. The scurvy was caused by lack of fresh meat and of vegetables; none of the doctors knew just why the cholera appeared; it seemed to come from the heat and the ground.

The condition of plucky Fort Wallace worried the general much. Succor must be brought in, of course. His own column had arrived pretty much exhausted by long marches; but he decided to take one hundred of the better mounted men and make a forced march to Fort Harker, for supplies. Captain Barnitz had not been able to spare any men for that purpose.

To Ned this was the most exciting march yet. It must be made mainly at night, for coolness and to evade the Indians. All the stage route from Wallace to Harker was said to be closely watched by the Cheyennes and Sioux. The stations were abandoned; or else the men had collected in their dug-outs, entered by underground passages from the station-house or the stable.

To approach these dug-outs, especially at night, was no pleasant matter. The first appeared as only a low mound of earth dimly outlined against the dusky

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horizon. In fact, the scouts must get off their horses and stoop against the ground, to see it. On slowly filed the column—and as the next thing that happened, out from the mound spurted a jet of fire—another—two more; and to “Crack! Bang-bang! Crack!” bullets hummed viciously past the general, and Captain Hamilton (who commanded the column), and Ned himself.

“What’s the matter there?” sung out loudly the general and the captain. “We’re friends! White men! Cavalry!”

“Bang! Bang-bang! Crack!” And more bullets.

“Get your men out of here quick, captain. Those fellows are crazy,” directed the general. “Send somebody forward to parley, and tell ’em who we are.”

Lieutenant Tom Custer volunteered.

“You’d better crawl,” advised the general.

Colonel Tom advanced, in the dusk, toward the low mound beside the station buildings. Presently he had disappeared; he was crawling. “Bang!” greeted him a shot.

“Hello!” he hailed. “Don’t shoot. We’re cavalry, I tell you.”

“Come in close then; stand up an’ show yourself, if you’re white,” retorted a voice.

“I’m coming,” answered Tom. “I’m Lieutenant Custer of the Seventh.”

The lieutenant arrived, and the column, listening,

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could hear him earnestly explaining. Now from the dug-out a light flickered, and the lieutenant shouted to the column to come on.

The dug-out held five station-men. They were waiting, on the outside, and even in the starlight they were sombre-eyed and haggard.

"What's the meaning of this, sirs?" demanded the general, angrily.

"Well, cap'n, you see it's this way," explained the leader, a huge man with great full beard reaching to his waist. "We thought you was Injuns, an' we ain't takin' any chances, these days."

"But you heard us hail you in good English."

"Certain we did; but that didn't prove much. No, sir-ee. There are Injuns who speak as good English as you do, an' that's one o' their latest tricks. They're up to every sort o' scheme, cap'n; an' while we're sorry to shoot at you, lettin' strangers get near at night is too risky a matter. Speakin' English don't count with us fellows. We're on to that Injun trick."

Therefore every occupied stage station must be approached with great caution. Besides the station dug-outs, the negro infantry posted in squads along the route to protect it had their dug-outs, too. These were of a more military nature than the station dug-outs, and were styled "monitors," after the Monitor which fought the Merrimac, during the Civil War.

The negro squads first dug out a square hole about

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breast deep, and large enough—say fifteen feet or more square—to hold them all. About the rim they piled up the dirt and sod; and from side to side they laid a roof of planks covered with more sod. Then they cut small loop-holes in the low walls, and ran a tunnel out a short distance, with a trap door. And they were well fixed. They could not be touched by fire or arrow or bullet.

These queer fortifications, like huge squat mushrooms upon the flat surface of the bare prairie, did indeed resemble a “cheese-box on a raft.” At one of them, when the column arrived, the five negro soldiers under a corporal were bubbling with glee.

“Yes, suh,” narrated the corporal, to the general and anybody else who could hear, “we done had a fight. But ’twarn’t a fight; it was jes’ a sort o’ massacree. After we got this heah monitor ’bout finished, a whole lot o’ Injuns come ridin’ along. Reckon dey must have been five hunderd or five thousand. Fust t’ing dey see, dey see dis ol’ hump a stickin’ up. Don’t know what it-all means. No, suh. Got mighty curyus. We-all lay low, an’ let ’em look an’ talk. Dey got so curyus dey couldn’t hold off any longer, so dey rode in, cranin’ an’ stretchin’ laike chickens. When dey come right close, ‘Gin it to ’em!’ say I. ‘Gin it to ’em!’ An’ we did gin it to ’em, out the loop-holes. We gin it to ’em, an’ when dey skadoodled we gin it to ’em some more, an’ kep’

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ginnin' it to 'em till dey's out o' range. Hi-yah-yah! Dey shore was scared."

And—"Hi-yah-yah!" shouted in laughter his five privates.

"Good!" praised the general. "How many did they leave on the field, corporal?"

"Well, dey didn't leab no one on the field, gin'ral," answered the corporal. "But I reckon we mus' have killed 'bout half, an' other half was nigh scyared to deff."

The general was in a great hurry to reach Fort Hays, where (as all supposed) was Mrs. Custer; and to reach Fort Harker, where could be obtained the medicines and the food for suffering Fort Wallace.

At Fort Hays was found no Mrs. Custer, or Miss Diana, or black Eliza. But all heard about a sudden flood from Big Creek which had drowned several soldiers and had almost swept away the tent and the women together; after that, the general's household had been sent back to Fort Harker, because Hays was not considered safe for them. Here at Hays were waiting letters from Mrs. Custer, and the word that at Harker the cholera was raging deadly.

Now the general was much alarmed; and leaving Captain Hamilton and the company to rest a day at Hays, with Lieutenant Cook and Captain Tom Custer and Ned and two soldiers he pushed on for Harker. The march from Wallace to Hays, 150

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miles, had been made in fifty-five hours; the ride from Hays to Harker, sixty miles, was made in eleven and a half hours—which was pretty good, considering the long ride that had preceded.

Mrs. Custer was not at Harker. She and Miss Diana and Eliza had been forwarded on to Riley, for Harker was no place in which to stay. So from Harker the general also hastened to Riley—but Ned did not go. Suddenly he felt ill; and the surgeon said that he had the cholera.

XII

PHIL SHERIDAN ARRIVES

NED was a very ill boy; but from the hospital at Fort Riley he was able to accompany his regiment to Fort Leavenworth. Here they comfortably spent the winter. Of many finely constructed buildings, in the midst of a one-thousand-acre military reservation overlooking the Missouri River, near to the bustling city of Leavenworth, with its cavalry and infantry and artillery, Fort Leavenworth, headquarters post of the Department of the Missouri, was a decided change from Wallace and Hays and Harker and even Fort Riley.

The fall and winter were quiet, while out on the southwest plains a Government Peace Commission made a new treaty with the tribes. The Cheyennes were still angry because General Hancock had destroyed their village; but all agreed to go upon a reservation in Indian Territory, and to let the railroads, the trails and the settlers alone.

In the spring another treaty was made at Fort Laramie, in the north, with the Sioux. The Government promised to withdraw its soldiers from the Sioux' hunting grounds of the Powder River Valley east of the Big Horn Mountains in northeastern

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Wyoming and southeastern Montana. To protect these their last hunting grounds, of the famous Black Hills country, Red Cloud the Sioux chief had been fighting long and hard.

Speedily they sent word to their cousins the Cheyennes, Kiowas and all, of Nebraska, Kansas and Colorado, encouraging them also to drive out the white men. Already the Cheyennes and Kiowas and Comanches objected to going upon their reservation; they said they had not understood that they were to give up good land for poor land.

The Kansas Pacific Railroad had reached Hays City, and had halted there as if to rest. The doughty General Hancock had been changed to New Orleans, and as commander of the Department of the Missouri had been succeeded by Major-General Philip H. Sheridan.

Everybody knew Phil Sheridan the fighting Irishman. He visited briefly at Fort Leavenworth in September of 1867, to assume command; and here Ned had a glimpse of him. He was unlike either General Sherman or General Hancock. A little man was Sheridan, of Irish face, close-cropped grizzled hair, keen gray eyes, reddish moustache and small tuft of hair beneath his lower lip. With his slight body, full chest, short neck, large bullet head, and aggressive manner, he resembled a lion. He was the man who had made that famous "Sheridan's Ride" from Winchester to Cedar Creek, in the Civil War, and saved

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the day for the Union Army. He had been General Custer's commander.

In April the Seventh was ordered back to Fort Harker, to be on hand in case of Indian trouble. But it was not the same regiment; for it lacked General Custer.

The general had been suspended from rank and pay for one year! The claim was made that he had marched his men too hard from Wallace to Hays, and that he had absented himself from Fort Wallace without leave, to go to Mrs. Custer at Fort Riley. His friends believed that he was innocent of any misdoing; but his jealous enemies triumphed, and the War Department had disciplined him.

Nevertheless he had spent the winter at Leavenworth, occupying the quarters of General Sheridan himself. One good thing had happened. In the fall Mr. Kidder, father of the slain Lieutenant Kidder of the Second Cavalry, had appeared at Leavenworth, looking for his son's body. General Custer spoke of the black-and-white checked collar-band, upon one of the bodies; and the father had instantly said that his son had worn just such a shirt, made for him by his mother, for use on the plains. With an escort, the father had hastened on to the Beaver Creek battleground, for the remains of his dear boy.

Now General Custer was at his old home of Monroe, Michigan, to spend the rest of his term. The Seventh Cavalry must take the field without him.

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And much it missed its leader—the dashing Custer of the long yellow hair and the crimson tie and the buckskin coat; it missed his horses and his dogs and his enthusiasm; it missed Mrs. Custer.

Ned had been relieved from trumpeter duties, and was taking it more easy as clerk in the quartermaster department. His post was made Fort Hays, and here he was when his regiment arrived to camp just outside.

Fort Hays had improved. The log quarters were giving place to story and a half frame houses, painted. The town also had expanded. The coming of the railroad had made it grow greatly, although it was not any handsomer. It was a town without law except the law of rope and of pistol. Wild Bill Hickok with his two ivory-handled revolvers and his steely eyes and his quiet manner was the peace-maker; but in making peace men frequently were killed.

This was a scout headquarters. Constantly in and out, riding the trails, was Wild Bill; so was Will Comstock; so was California Joe and so was Pony Bill Cody. But they called him Pony Bill no longer. He was now Buffalo Bill. During the past fall he had been employed in supplying buffaloes to feed the laborers on the Kansas Pacific survey. By the amount of buffalo that he had shot he astonished everybody. In a friendly contest with Will Comstock he had killed sixty-nine to Comstock's forty-six—and Comstock was one of the crack hunters of the plains.

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There were several new scouts, too : Sharpe Grover and Jack Corbin and Dick Parr and Jack Stillwell and Bill Trudell; all good.

During the spring and summer the railroad pushed on westward. To the north the Sioux were quiet and satisfied, but in the south the Kiowas and Comanches and Arapahos and all demanded better terms, and guns and ammunition, ere they went upon their reservation. Scouts Comstock and Grover and Parr were employed especially to visit about among the tribes and explain matters and urge peace. Lieutenant Fred H. Beecher, a nephew of the great preacher Henry Ward Beecher of New York City, directed their movements.

This seemed like a very good scheme. For——

“In my opinion, gentlemen,” said in Ned’s hearing Wild Bill, “it’s worth a lot o’ trouble, and the Government can afford to give in on a few points, to keep those settlers from being murdered, who are out here with their families, trying hard to build up the country. If we can only hold those Injuns off till fall, after the buffalo season, and get ’em on their reservation for the winter, we can then watch ’em.”

From Fort Hays the Seventh Cavalry marched south, in early summer, to join with some of the Tenth Cavalry and the Third Infantry, along the Arkansas River near Fort Larned and Fort Dodge. The Indian villages were still in this vicinity, and the young men were restless and full of threats. General

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Alfred Sully, who had fought the Sioux in Dakota in 1863, was in command down here, over the District of the Arkansas.

Ned was retained on his quartermaster department detail; but he was growing eager to take the field with his comrades.

Affairs seemed to be shaping all right, until in July arrived at Fort Hays, by courier from Fort Larned, word that the warriors were leaving the villages, and trailing northward. Quickly following came the news that a party of Cheyennes had raided the friendly Kaws, or Kansas Indians, near Council Grove south of Riley, and had robbed settlers.

This must not be permitted, for the United States was bound to protect its Indian friends.

The Cheyennes and Arapahos and all had not been given the guns and ammunition promised them by the treaty. Now it was time for the annual distribution of gifts. When the Comanches and the Kiowas gathered at Fort Larned to receive them, the agent announced that they could have no rifles or pistols or powder and lead until the Kaws and the settlers had been paid for the damage done to them.

This made the Indians angry. They refused all gifts, and returned to their camp, the young men began to war-dance.

General Sully appeared at Fort Larned, and prepared for action. But Little Rock, Cheyenne chief, claimed that only some bad young men, on an expedi-

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tion against the Pawnees, had robbed the Kaws and the settlers. All the chiefs promised that if guns and ammunition were issued, so that their people might hunt the buffalo, everything would be quiet.

“No more trips will be made by my people into the settlements,” assured Little Raven, the fat old Arapaho chief, who had always been friendly toward the whites. “Their hearts are good, and they wish to be at peace forever.”

So even General Sully was convinced, and ordered the guns and ammunition to be issued.

“The gen’ral ought to’ve known better, gentlemen,” declared Scout Will Comstock, speaking of the matter at Fort Hays, where he had arrived on an errand. “Those Injuns talked ’round him. One hundred pistols, eighty rifles, twelve kegs powder, half a keg o’ lead, fifteen thousand caps, to the ’Rapahos; forty pistols, twenty rifles, three kegs powder, half a keg o’ lead, five thousand caps to the ’Paches; Cheyennes, Comanches, Kiowas—they’re bein’ treated the same; that’s the case to-day. And, gentlemen,” he added, impressively, “you mark my words. We’ll hear from those weepons in a way we won’t like. I know Injuns. Little Raven an’ Black Kettle may mean all right, when speakin’, but they can’t control their bucks. We’ll all be fightin’ those same guns before the buff’ler turn south.”

Now August had set in; and on the seventh who should arrive at the post of Fort Hays but a large

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band of the Indians from the Arkansas. They had come up from the Pawnee Fork west of Fort Larned, and said they were on their way to fight the Pawnees. There were four or five Arapahos, and twenty Sioux visitors from the north, and 200 Cheyennes. Old Black Kettle the Cheyenne chief was leader; other chiefs were Tall Wolf and Red Nose and Porcupine Bear and Bear That Goes Ahead (Cheyennes), and even a son of Little Raven the Arapaho chief.

That night they held a big powwow. Black Kettle shook hands with all the soldiers within reach. From beside the council camp-fire he made a speech, to say, as translated by Wilson the post trader:

“The white soldiers ought to be glad all the time, because their ponies are so big and so strong, and because they have so many guns and so much to eat. All other Indians may take the war path, but Black Kettle will forever keep peace with his white brothers. He loves his white brothers, and his heart feels glad when he meets them and shakes their hands in friendship.”

This sounded very good, for the whites; but everybody knew that the Black Kettle band had no business going out to fight the Pawnees or anybody else. If they didn't find the Pawnees, then they might try to fight whomever they met.

Away they rode, in their war-paint; and next, dreadful tidings came back. First, into Fort Harker were brought by their husbands two white women;

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almost crazed the men related that a party of Cheyennes had entered their ranch house, on the Saline River north of Harker, and after being kindly treated to hot coffee and sugar, had thrown the coffee in the women's faces, knocked the men down, and abused all terribly. Two other white men had been killed in the fields with clubs; a woman had been killed, and two children had been carried away.

This was the news, to Hays from Fort Harker. From Fort Wallace, in the other direction, came word as shocking. Boyish Scout Will Comstock had been murdered by friendly Chief Turkey Leg's Cheyennes; Sharpe Grover, his companion, had been desperately wounded.

Some of the young Cheyennes had tried to trade with Comstock for his prized revolver. But he would not trade. It was the same revolver that he promised to give to General Custer as soon as he had guided the general to a victory. The young Indians then rode with him and Grover to escort them from the village. Presently they dropped behind, did the Indians, shot Will Comstock dead, through the back, and almost killed Grover. But from shelter of his chum's body, with his long-range rifle Grover fought all day. During the night and the next day he hid in a ravine; and through the ensuing darkness he crawled and staggered clear to Fort Wallace, where he gasped out the tale.

'Aye, the buffalo had not turned southward, but

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already were Fort Hays and the other white stations of the southwest hearing from the guns and pistols issued at Fort Larned. From the Smoky Hill stage route and that of the Santa Fé, from the Republican, the Saline, the Arkansas and the Cimarron, at last along the telegraph line passed report after report, brought in by settler and scout and courier, telling of onslaught by Cheyenne, Kiowa and Comanche. The town of Sheridan, at the end of the Kansas Pacific Railroad, only fifteen miles from Fort Wallace, announced that it had been attacked and for two days kept in a state of siege!

Settlers and scouts and other frontiersmen began to pour into Fort Hays and Hays City; and here arrived General Sheridan himself—the small-bodied, large-headed, bristly little Irishman, with fire in his gray eyes.

“This is war,” Ned heard him repeat. “We’ll fight them to a finish. The only way to control them is to destroy them wherever they are to be found, until they all are confined on a reservation.”

Buffalo Bill Cody had been assigned to the quartermaster department with station at Fort Larned. Now one day he came riding posthaste into Hays, his horse matted with sweaty dust, he as dusty and as tired. He bore dispatches, and reported that all his route of seventy miles had been infested with hostile warriors.

He volunteered to return at once over the same route, with dispatches for Fort Dodge, thirty miles

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further. Back he rode; and in two more days he was at Hays again. He had ridden 350 miles in fifty-five hours. He stayed at Fort Hays, for General Sheridan promoted him to be Chief of Scouts for the Fifth Cavalry.

Buffalo Bill's last dispatches told that the old men and squaws left in the villages were packing the tipis and were moving south, as if the Indians did not intend to winter on any reservation. Evidently the winter villages were to be set up where the soldiers could not follow.

From General Sheridan went quick orders to General Sully to stop the Indians, and turn them. And as the soldiers were being kept busy, in the south and guarding the Smoky Hill trail, to protect the settlers northward an expedition of volunteers was ordered out.

They all were frontiersmen, who gladly rallied to fight for ranch and town. Thirty enlisted at Fort Harker, seventeen at Fort Hays. General George A. Forsyth, who was called "Sandy" and was colonel on the staff of General Sheridan, was the commanding officer. Lieutenant Beecher was his aide. Dr. John S. Mooers of Kansas City, surgeon in the Civil War, was medical officer; General W. H. H. McCall, of the Civil War, was first sergeant. Sharpe Grover (now well again) was the guide; Stillwell and Tru-dell and Dick Parr were among the scouts.

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Ned burned to go, but he was refused because of his youth.

"You wait," comforted Jack Stillwell—a jaunty young fellow, with waist like a girl's and face as smooth as Ned's own. "There'll be plenty left for you other people, soldiers and all, to do. Wait till Sheridan gets out after 'em."

"Wall, there won't be as many as there are now," remarked significantly Sharpe Grover, standing near.

In truth so thought Ned when, on the twenty-eighth of August, out from Fort Hays rode against the Dog Soldiers raiding the settlements the little company of half a hundred—few in numbers but every man a skilled shot. They were well armed with Spencer and Henry repeating rifles, and had much ammunition. General "Sandy" Forsyth and Sharpe Grover led.

A few days passed. Ned must continue with his clerkship duties—which, of course, somebody must perform, even in war. Soldiering is not all fighting.

Next, was it learned that south of the Arkansas General Sully, his Seventh Cavalry and his Third Infantry, had almost lost their wagon-train and had been driven back into Fort Dodge! One trooper had been captured by the Indians (poor fellow, Ned knew him well) and carried off to be tortured to death. Captain Hamilton and Captain Smith had charged with their companies in vain, to rescue him.

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And next came the more startling news that on the Arikaree branch of the upper Republican, not far from the Forks where Pawnee Killer had attacked the Seventh Cavalry camp, 700 Cheyenne warriors under Chief Roman Nose had surrounded General Forsyth's fifty men, and had almost "wiped them out." After a terrific fight of three days and three nights, the volunteers had been rescued by Colonel Carpenter and his Tenth Cavalry from Fort Wallace. Lieutenant Beecher and Dr. Mooers had been killed; the general thrice wounded; Roman Nose and many of his braves had fallen. Jack Stillwell had brought the first dispatch through to Wallace; Trudell had been his companion.

Yes, war it was. Wouldn't Custer be needed? At Monroe, Michigan, wouldn't he be chafing? His term of discipline was almost done. Then, as sudden great news, appeared in the Leavenworth daily paper received at Fort Hays the following telegram, copied:

Headquarters Department of the Missouri,

In the Field, Fort Hays, Kansas, September 24, 1868.

General G. A. Custer, Monroe, Michigan:

Generals Sherman, Sully, and myself, and nearly all the officers of your regiment, have asked for you, and I hope the application will be successful. Can you come at once? Eleven companies of your regiment will move about the 1st of October against the hostile Indians, from Medicine Lodge Creek toward the Wichita Mountains.

P. H. SHERIDAN, *Major-General Commanding.*

XIII

THE YELLOW HAIR RIDES AGAIN

GENERAL CUSTER did not delay. He never did. Within less than a week, on the last morning of September who should come racing into the post, accompanying the ambulance from the railroad station at Hays City, but Maida and Blucher and Flirt the stag hounds, and Rover the old fox hound, and Fanny the little fox-terrier, and all the other Custer dogs; and who should spring out of the ambulance, before it had stopped at headquarters, but the general himself! There he was, with his yellow hair and his shining eyes and his quick voice and his lithe, trim figure, ready for business again.

Behind the ambulance followed, led by an orderly, the horses Phil Sheridan and Custis Lee.

From beyond the headquarters office seeing this, Ned's heart leaped into his throat.

"Custer's come! Custer's come!" seemed to run through the post a glad hum. To Ned it was like a bugle-call; and he instantly resolved that where the general went, he was going too. No more clerkship duties for him; no! Suddenly he felt strong and

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well, ready for anything. That was how the general made everybody around him feel; he was so full of energy and enthusiasm.

Now was it positively known that General Sheridan planned a winter's march against the Indians, to catch them in their villages while there was no grass for their ponies and they could not travel at will. Many heads were shaken, over this scheme, as being a fool-hardy one; and clear from St. Louis came out to Hays a tall, lean, leathery-faced, squint-eyed man—"old Jim Bridger" the celebrated trapper and mountaineer—expressly to tell General Sheridan that the whole command would be snowed in and lost.

But five hundred freighting wagons were busy taking supplies from Fort Harker and Fort Leavenworth to the posts south in the Arkansas River country; and with these supplies on hand, for the soldiers and the horses, and with the men well clothed, General Sheridan reasoned that the white men would do better in the winter than the red men.

"The only way to bring those Indians to terms is to give them a good thrashing. I rely on you for this, Custer," Ned heard him say. "We'll carry the war into the enemy's country, when he isn't expecting it."

Nothing loth was General Custer; no, not "Old Curly." He acted as happy as if he were starting out on a buffalo hunt or a ride with Mrs. Custer and the dogs. He stayed only a couple of days at Hays,

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for instructions and final preparations; and when out he rode, southward bound, eager to resume command of the Seventh, Ned rode with him, as his orderly again.

Fort Hays was well stripped of its scouts whom Ned knew: California Joe, Jack Stillwell, Jack Corbin, Trudell, Romeo—they were south on the Arkansas; Buffalo Bill was out with some of the Fifth Cavalry; Wild Bill was carrying dispatches on the trail: and with them gone, and with the Seventh gone, Ned had been feeling lonesome and neglected. Now all was changed: he was riding again with Custer. Hurrah!

The rendezvous of the Seventh Cavalry was on Bluff Creek, about thirty miles southeast of Fort Dodge. Fort Dodge was up the Arkansas from Fort Larned, and was of stone like Larned and Riley. General Custer paused here only to report to General Sully, commanding the district. The next day he proceeded on; and in the afternoon were sighted the familiar white army tents of the Seventh Cavalry.

What a welcome there was, as the troops turned out to receive him, and the dogs barked, and as soon as they might the officers flocked to shake his hand.

There were some new officers and many new men, for recruits had been rushed to fill the ranks to war strength. However, there were enough old friendly faces to make the camp of the Seventh feel like home to Ned; and he was almost as busy shaking hands as was the general.

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"Back again, are ye?" greeted Odell, heartily.

"Yes," grinned Ned.

"Wance more orderly, then, I take it."

"Guess I am, for a while."

"Well, the gen'ral sticks to those he likes, an' to those he doesn't like, the same. He's got a big heart. What's the news from Hays? Is Gen'ral Sheridan comin', too?"

"Yes. He says the Indians are to be found and threshed."

"B' gorry, with Phil Sheridan an' 'Old Curly' workin' together, this 'll be no paper campaign, I reckon."

"Right you are," agreed Sergeant Walter Kennedy—who, Ned noted, wore the chevrons of a sergeant-major. "Because they turned Sully and the rest of us back into Dodge the Injuns think they're the bosses. But when once Sheridan and Custer get after 'em in earnest, they'll change their minds."

California Joe was here, in all his glory.

"Is Shuridan comin', young feller?" he asked. "Wall, he can't do wuss'n those other high-up gen'als have done. But I sorter bet on Shuridan."

"Do you know him, Joe?" queried Ned, politely.

"Do I know him, young feller? Know Shuridan? Why, bless my soul, I knowed Shuridan 'way up in Oregon more'n fifteen years ago, an' he was only a second lootenant of infantry. Quartermaster of the foot, or somethin' of that sort. I had a sneakin'

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notion if ever they turned him loose he'd hurt somebody. Say, warn't he old lightnin', in the war! I tell ye!" And Joe wiped his hairy face with a piece of gunnysack that he used as a handkerchief. "I jest been app'inted by Gen'ral Custer chief o' scouts down here; but I told him I wouldn't serve if this was to be ary ambulance campaignin'. He said no; him an' Shuridan was goin' to chase the Injuns horseback, so as to ketch 'em. That hit the nail squar on the head. A column on wheels, with the wagons piled full o' soldiers like as if they was goin' to a town fun'ral in the States, stands 'bout as many chances of ketchin' Injuns as a six-mule team would of ketchin' a pack of coyotes. Why, that sort o' thing is only fun for the Injuns."

While waiting for instructions from General Sheridan, the Seventh Cavalry worked hard to arrive at what Odell called their "fighting weight." Five hundred fresh horses arrived by trail from Leavenworth. The general chose for himself a lively bay which he named Dandy. The others were apportioned out, and then the troops or companies were "colored." That is, the horses were divided by colors; so that one troop was composed of the grays, another of the blacks, another of the bays, and so forth. The junior company commander must be content with the brindles—the mixed colors left over.

Target practice was made an order of the day, for some of the recruits never had fired a gun. Forty

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of the best shots at all distances were formed into a company of sharpshooters, under Lieutenant "Queen's Own" William Cook, he with the long English side-whiskers.

There were scouting expeditions, and plenty of hunting. The camp fairly lived on wild turkey and deer and elk and buffalo and rabbit and grouse. The general's dogs chased wolves and antelope.

October wore away. Soon the Indians of the plains would be retiring into their villages, for the winter. They would eat dried buffalo meat and their horses would eat cottonwood bark and willows; and they would not expect to be interfered with. Then in the spring they would issue forth again, to ride hither-thither, three miles to the cavalry's one.

By the reports which Scout Buffalo Bill had brought up to Fort Hays from Fort Larned, the families of the Indians had been moving southward. Therefore General Sheridan believed that the main winter villages would be found down in the Indian Territory, toward Texas. This was a wild rugged country, where white men rarely penetrated. But the Cheyennes and the Kiowas and the Comanches knew it well.

General Sully and Uncle John Smith, an old trader who had married into the Cheyennes, had located a good rendezvous place for the expedition, where, forming the North Canadian River, Wolf Creek and Beaver Creek joined, about one hundred miles south

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of Fort Dodge. With a huge supply train of four hundred wagons and with five companies of the Third Regular Infantry under Major John H. Page, the eleven companies of the Seventh arrived there, to wait for the Nineteenth Kansas Volunteer Cavalry. Governor Crawford of Kansas had resigned to be its colonel in the field; and General Sherman's last dispatch had said that the regiment was on its way.

The camp was named Camp Supply, because the supplies were to be stored here. It is in present Woodward County, northwestern Oklahoma.

XIV

THE WINTER WARPATH

AROUND-ABOUT storms continued to threaten. The air was crisp but uncertain. Everybody must turn to and help erect store-houses to shelter the supplies. The Kansas Volunteers should arrive at any moment; but they did not, for they were lost and snowed in and starving, far to the north.

However, in the midst of the anxiety and the impatience General Sheridan arrived. With his escort he appeared in the afternoon of November 21. He brought in 350 men: a company of the Tenth Regular Cavalry; the "Sandy" Forsyth scouts who had fought at the Arikaree, now under Lieutenant Lewis Pepoon; two companies of the Kansas Volunteers who had been sent ahead of the regiment to Fort Dodge; twelve Osage Indian scouts, and ten Kansas Indian scouts. Lieutenant Thomas Lebo of the Tenth Cavalry was in command of the escort.

Everybody was glad to see General Sheridan come. With "Little Phil" on the scene, the campaign would start right up. General Custer had gone enthusiastically galloping to meet him and ride in with him, and discuss the situation.

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Most interesting of the new arrivals were the Osages. They hated the Cheyennes, Comanches, Kiowas, and all these raiding Indians who pillaged them as well as the whites; through the Civil War the Osages had acted as Union scouts, on the plains.

The chief in the squad was a tall straight old man named Cha-pa-jen-kan, or Little Beaver. Another chief was old Wen-tsi-kee or Hard Rope, rather fat and reported to be very wise. Of the warriors Koom-la-Manche or the Trotter was the most famous, as a fast runner and a fine shot.

The Osages had "made medicine" for the warpath at Fort Hays; the Kaws had made their medicine on the way down. They all were armed with the new breech-loading Springfield rifles; and were paid seventy-five dollars a month and expenses. To show how they could shoot, that evening the Osages on their war-ponies galloped past a log of wood, firing at it; and every shot struck.

The Sheridan column reported terrible weather, on their march down from Fort Hays. One blizzard after another had assailed them; the plains were covered with snow; the Arkansas River at Fort Dodge was thick with floating ice.

This very evening the winter descended upon Camp Supply also. The snow began to fall heavily; but standing out in the storm the Seventh Cavalry band lustily serenaded the Sheridan headquarters. The Seventh were proud of their band. Odell said that it

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was the best in the army. It could play as well on horseback as afoot. Wherever the troopers went, the band went too. General Custer was fond of music and believed that it did the regiment good.

General Custer was in consultation with General Sheridan that evening; and in the morning was it soon known that the Seventh Cavalry would not wait for the Kansas Volunteers, but would start at once against the Indians. The General Sheridan column, in coming down from the Arkansas, had struck a fresh trail of an Indian war party heading north, on a raid. The Seventh Cavalry were to follow this trail backward, so that it would lead them to the village.

Ned heard his general reading the orders over to Adjutant Moylan. They sounded just like Sheridan, as they said:

To proceed south, in the direction of the Antelope Hills, thence toward the Washita River, the supposed winter seat of the hostile tribes; to destroy their villages and ponies; to kill or hang all warriors, and bring back all women and children.

The snow was still falling fast; but nobody cared, and least of all General Custer. He had told General Sheridan that he would be ready to move out in twenty-four hours; and so he was. By night the wagon-train of supplies for thirty days had been made up. Only a few tents were allowed; the baggage was stripped down to blankets and overcoats.

Reveille was at three o'clock; into the snow and the dark tumbled out the troopers of the Seventh;

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and at stables and mess and even at roll-call sundry jokes passed about. Everybody was uncomfortable, but nobody was complaining.

The sentries were knee-deep in the snow; the horses shivered; the cooks had hard work to cook the breakfasts.

"How's this for a winter campaign?" demanded Adjutant Moylan, trudging almost over his cavalry boots, to the headquarters tent.

"Fine! Fine!" declared General Custer, peering out. "Just what we want."

"Well, we've got it, then," assured the adjutant, snow-covered.

So they were off, willy-nilly, thought Ned.

It was just daylight when at the word from the adjutant he blew "Boots and Saddles." The notes not only set the cavalry into action, but seemed to awaken all the camp; for tents were thrown open and officers and men of the infantry and the volunteers poked out their heads. The general went galloping across to the tent of General Sheridan.

"Is that you, Custer? What do you think about the storm?" The words of General Sheridan issued muffled but plain, into the driving flakes.

"Just the thing, general," answered so buoyantly "Old Curly." "We can move but the Indians can't. I'd ask nothing better than a week of this."

"Good-by, old fellow. Take care of yourself," called from the door of his tent Lieutenant Taylor,

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an aide, as General Custer galloped back. Wrapped in a huge buffalo-robe, Lieutenant Taylor looked like a chief.

The general waved at him.

"To horse," sounded Ned.

The troopers, misty in the storm, stood ready.

"Prepare to mount!" was shouted the order.

"Mount! By fours—right! For-r'd—march!"

All along the line of tents hands waved and voices called, for good-by and good luck, as in column of fours out at a walk rode the Seventh Cavalry, eleven companies, 800 men, bound against the storm and the Indians. Bravely blared the band, playing "The Girl I Left Behind Me."

General Custer wore a round wolf-fur cap with ear-tabs, fur mittens, and on his feet great buffalo-hide over-shoes with the hair inside. That was trapper style. His double-breasted cavalry overcoat kept his body warm. The whole command was dressed after any fashion that would be comfortable. California Joe was rigged as customary in his old slouch hat tied down scoop-shape, on his hands were enormous buffalo-hide mittens, on his feet hide shoes like the general's. The Osages, who were taken, sat stiffly with their buffalo robes projecting above their heads, behind. Hard Rope shivered and shook, and murmured plaintively.

"What's he saying?" queried the general, of the interpreter.

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"He says it's bad for an old man to be alone in cold weather, and he will capture a Cheyenne squaw to keep his back warm," explained the interpreter.

But the scouts were soon out of hearing and out of sight. They were supposed to take the advance, so as to read sign and guide the column to the next camping place, fifteen miles. After them trailed the long column of snow-covered troopers and horses, with the baggage wagons toiling at the rear. Behind the wagons rode a troop as guard.

The scouts knew where the trail of the hostile war party had been crossed, but the snow concealed it and all landmarks. And still the snow fell, until when after the fifteen miles march (which required all day) the column went into camp the chill white mantle was eighteen inches thick.

"How is it, Joe? Cleared off, hasn't it?" invited the general, as on a short tour of inspection in the gray of the next morning he encountered that worthy.

"Yep, trav'lin's good overhead to-day, good mornin', gen'ral," answered the ready Joe. "An' I've got an infarnal chronical cough that's been nigh scuttlin' me this two days, an' I've bin thinkin' that I cotched the glanders, an' they might as well shoot a fellow to onct as to have that botherin' him."

"Sorry, Joe," laughed the general.

The march was south, up the valley of Wolf Creek. Patches of willows and timber were full of deer and elk and buffalo that had been driven there by the

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storm. Maida and Blucher the general's stag-hounds had great fun chasing them; and the column secured plenty of meat.

Now the march left the valley of the Wolf, and crossed to the valley of the Canadian, a day's march southward. Beyond the Canadian lay the country of the Washita River, where, everybody believed, were the winter villages of the hostile Indians. The Cheyennes, the Kiowas, the Comanches, the Apaches—there might they be found, snugly encamped until the call of spring.

This was the third day. The Yellow Hair and his cavalry were sixty miles into the Indian's own country, where white cavalry never before had been. Around-about stretched the snowy wilderness of plains and water-course. It was time that some trace of the Indians be found. On a scout up along the Canadian was sent the gallant Major Joel Elliot, who never did things by halves. He was given three troops. He was to travel light, without wagons, but with one hundred rounds of carbine ammunition to the man, one day's rations, and horse forage. If an Indian trail was discovered, he was to pursue at once, and to send back a courier with the news. With soldiers and scouts, both red and white, west along the snowy banks of the Canadian, from whose red soil the wind had blown the snow, rode Major Elliot.

California Joe had found a ford, and aiming for the Washita, through the floating ice of the swift

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current crossed the horses and the wagons. Helping, the men must wade waist-deep. This was cold, mean work, but it was done in three hours.

The high round Antelope Hills loomed ahead. These were the landmarks of the march and Little Beaver and Hard Rope and their followers had struck them exactly. Up the further slope of the Canadian Valley toiled the hooded, heavy army wagons.

Major Elliot had been gone three hours or more.

From a little knoll the general had been surveying and directing, while Ned sat his horse beside him, and Adjutant Moylan bustled hither-thither. The rear guard finally had crossed, below. For this they were waiting.

"All right," remarked the general, shortly, to Ned. "Sound to horse." And—"No! Wait!" he thundered. "Here comes somebody."

He pointed, and leveled his glasses. Down from the north was approaching at steady gallop a figure black against the white background.

"It's Corbin," pronounced the general, 'gazing earnestly through his glass. His tanned face flushed high.

Yes, it was Corbin—Jack Corbin the scout who was a partner of California Joe. Evidently he bore important news, for he was urging his horse mercilessly. He arrived—his face frosty and his horse gasping through wide frosty nostrils. The general

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did not say a word, in query; none was needed, for Corbin spoke at once.

"We've struck the trail, about twelve miles north. Hundred and fifty Injuns, pointin' southeast, for the Washita. Made within twenty-four hours."

"Good!" ejaculated the general. "Where's Elliot?"

"Follerin'."

"Can you catch him, with a fresh horse?"

"Reckon I can."

"Take that horse there," directed the general.

Corbin was changing saddle in a jiffy.

"Tell Major Elliot to push the pursuit as rapidly as he can, and I'll cut across country and join him. If the trail changes direction so that I may not strike it, he is to let me know. If I do not join him by eight o'clock tonight he is to halt and wait for me."

Without a word away galloped Jack Corbin.

"Sound officers' call, bugler," bade the general, to Ned.

So busy had been the officers that apparently none had noted the arrival and departure of Jack. But now at the bugle notes they hastened up, curious to know the occasion. In his quick, sharp manner the general told them what had happened.

"Now, gentlemen, this is our chance," he added. "We mustn't neglect it, and we mustn't let Major Elliot do all the fighting. We'll cut loose. The wagons are to be left here, under guard of one officer

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and of ten men detailed from each company. Company commanders will make their own details. The officer of the day will remain in charge of the guard, and bring on the wagons, following our trail as fast as practicable. The pursuing column will be in light marching order. Never mind the weather. The Indians are of more importance. Commands will be limited to one hundred rounds of ammunition to the man, and such coffee, hard bread, forage and blankets as he can carry on the saddle. Tents and extra blankets to be left with the wagons. That is all, gentlemen." And the general looked at his watch. "The advance will be sounded in twenty minutes. Adjutant, you will inform the officer of the day as to the arrangements."

At once half a dozen voices spoke, in little chorus.

"That's Hamilton! Oh, we ought to have Hamilton with us!"

The general smiled and shook his head.

"Somebody's duty is with the wagon-train."

Out scattered the officers, for time was indeed short, and the general never accepted excuses for delay. Young Captain Hamilton, as officer of the day in charge of the rear guard, which had just crossed, had been absent from the conference; now he came galloping, interrupting the general who had plunged into the preparations. The captain's face was white and anxious. He saluted.

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"Beg your pardon, general," he blurted. "But do I understand that the officer of the day remains with the wagon-train?"

"Yes, captain."

"But, general! I'm officer of the day!"

"I did not think of it at the time, Hamilton," replied the general, frankly. "I simply gave the instructions, and I'm afraid they must be followed."

"General!" exclaimed the captain. He was much distressed. Ned knew why, and appreciated. To stay behind, while the others fought, would be awful. "Then I must remain? Can't I go, sir?"

"The wagon-train must be protected," answered the general, kind but firm. "We'd like to have you with us, Hamilton. We need such men as you. But the train needs an officer, too; and this is soldier's luck. Your duty is here."

"It seems pretty hard that I've got to stay," he murmured, dismayed. "There's liable to be a big fight—and I won't be on hand to lead my squadron."

The general surveyed him, with eyes softening. Truly, the young captain, high-mettled and soldierly, made a sorry figure.

"I'll tell you, Hamilton. If—if you can find an officer who by one reason or another feels convinced that he should stay rather than you, he may take your place. Otherwise, as officer of the day your duty is with the train."

Captain Hamilton's face lighted,

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“Thank you, general! Thank you! I’ll go and see.” And whirling his horse, back he galloped, on this forlorn hope. Ned rather trusted that he would be successful.

Presently, here he came again. He was fairly shining, as he saluted.

“Lieutenant Mathey, sir! He has snow-blindness so he can scarcely see, and he would be of no use with the column. He has kindly consented to exchange with me. Shall I join my squadron, sir?”

“Very well, sir,” approved the general. And the glad Captain Louis Hamilton, grandson of Alexander Hamilton, went flying to his post.

In precisely due time the general looked at his watch. He vaulted into the saddle.

“All ready, Moylan,” he called. And, to Ned: “Sound the advance.”

XV

"WE ATTACK AT DAYLIGHT"

It was a long, long forced march. Wide and white lay the desolate desert beyond the Canadian, and through the foot of snow ploughed the eager column. Not a moving figure broke the white expanse; not a moving figure save the figures of California Joe and Romeo and Little Beaver and Hard Rope and the other scouts, as far in advance and on either side they rode seeking the Elliot trail. As the major, following the Indians, had been heading south-east, a course south ought to strike his tracks, soon or late.

Late it proved to be; for not until within an hour of sunset, and after a day's ride without halt for food or drink, did the column see Little Beaver stop short, and with uplifted hand signal a trail.

Such had been Thanksgiving Day, Thursday, November 26, 1868.

By the tracks, Major Elliot was still upon the trail of the village-bound Indians. After reading the pony sign, Little Beaver and his Osages declared that the

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Indians had passed on their way this very morning. Much relieved, the general ordered a trot; and forward pressed the column, to overtake the major. Dusk descended. Before were visible the outlines of timber, along a stream in a little valley. The general sent ahead a squad of soldiers and scouts, to catch the major and tell him to halt, at wood and water, and to wait.

“Tell him not to make camp, but to be ready for a night march when I join him,” added the general.

As for the column, at last they were given an hour, for rest and for coffee, and to feed the horses.

The zealous Major Elliot had gone further than anybody had expected. Not until nine o'clock at night, and after another hard ride through snow and timber and darkness, finally was he found, waiting as ordered, by a stream with high banks.

“An hour for rest, again,” ordered the general, briefly. “Then the moon will be up and we can take the trail. There are to be no bugle calls or other noise. Sound carries far, in this country. The men may make fire for coffee, small ones down under the edges of the banks so that the flames will not show. Send the Osages to me. I want to talk with them.”

The Osages were certain that this was a branch of the Washita River, and that the Cheyennes and Kiowas and all had their village not far down stream. The trail seemed to be leading straight for it. But

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through the half-breed interpreter Little Beaver kept insisting that the soldiers stay here concealed in the timber until daylight, and then march upon the trail again.

General Custer snapped his fingers impatiently, and laughed.

"That is the Indian way of fighting," he promptly said. "They hate to attack anybody concealed by the dark or by entrenchments. No, tell Little Beaver that we are going to fight white man's way, and that we march in one hour, when the moon rises."

This did not seem to satisfy the Osages, who murmured gutturally among themselves. Evidently, like Pawnee Killer, although for different reason, they did not regard any too highly the skill of the white chief, whom they called the Chief with the Long Yellow Hair.

The hour passed; the half moon rose; and one by one Captain Hamilton, Colonel Cook, Captain Yates, Captain Smith, Major Bell, and all the other company commanders reported to Adjutant Moylan that their detachments were ready for the march.

No bugles were sounded; but in column of fours the eight hundred horsemen rode in dim column down the course of the creek, following the Indian trail so plainly showing in the white snow.

Two of the Osages, Hard Rope and a warrior, led, three hundred yards in advance. They were on

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foot, the better to read sign; with long, silent moccasined tread they stole swiftly across the snow. They saw scalps, to be taken from their hated enemies the Cheyennes and the Kiowas.

After them rode in single file the white and red scouts, California Joe on his mule to the fore. His old Springfield musket lay in the hollow of his left arm; but for the once the reek of his pipe did not drift back. The orders forbade any smoking. Beside California Joe rode the general himself, to be on hand to catch the first word or signal. Close behind him rode Ned, trumpeter orderly.

At a quarter of a mile the column cautiously followed. Now and then one of the officers advanced at a trot, and whispered to the general, making suggestion or query; but even this did not break the silence. Ever the march continued, as if for hours and hours.

Suddenly California Joe pointed, significantly. The two Osages picking the trail had halted; at short command from the general Ned must fall out and tell Adjutant Moylan to halt the column also.

When he returned, at trot, the general was with the two Osages. One of them could speak a little English.

“What’s the matter?” asked the general.

“Me don’t know,” replied the Osage. “But me smell fire.”

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Adjutant Moylan, Colonel Myers (who was an old plainsman) and Colonel Benteen, arrived; they all sniffed hard, as did Ned; but none of them could smell a trace of smoke.

"Humph!" grunted Colonel Myers. "He's scared; that's what ails him. You know, these Indians don't favor this march, and they're trying to find an excuse to stop."

"Me smell fire," insisted the Osage; and his companion nodded violently.

"Do you smell anything, Joe?" queried the general.

California Joe wagged his head slowly, as he inhaled through his frosted brick-red whiskers.

"No, I don't, gen'ral. Nor Corbin neither. An' we got first-class smellers, too, though jest at this moment they're froze stiff."

"Very well," responded the general. "We'll proceed. Tell the trailers to go slow, and keep their noses and eyes open."

More than half a mile was covered; and again the Osages had halted. This time they were triumphant, and received the general with conscious dignity. The English-speaking Osage pointed before, to the left.

"Me told you so," he uttered, in whisper.

Sure enough. In front, one hundred yards beside the trail, at the edge of the timber, was low gleam of a camp-fire almost dead. It was only a handful of

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embers, and still Ned could not smell it; but there it was. Truly, those Osages had good noses.

Although through the drifting clouds of winter the moon shone brightly upon the long column waiting in the snow, from the fire no movement was made. The Indians who had built the fire must be sleeping.

“Joe, you and Little Beaver take a few of your men and scout around that camp,” whispered the general. A quaver in his voice told of his excitement. “Find out all you can. We’ll wait here.”

To the snow swung California Joe and Jack Corbin and Little Beaver and all the Osages. With click of rifle-lock they stole forward, on circuit to enter the timber above the fire and thus spy upon it. Presently they disappeared. Sat tense every officer and every soldier, peering, keen to meet any vicious volley which surely would empty saddles. For the column was a fair mark.

Was the hard, cold march of three days to be a failure? Were the Indians already on the alert? See! Now, bending low, out from the edge of the timber issued an Osage. California Joe followed close. One after another the scouts all issued, approaching the fire. They reached it, they straightened up—apparently nothing happened, and a great sigh of relief swept through the tense column, where the companies sat at their intervals.

After prying about, and examining shrewdly, the scouts returned. California Joe reported.

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“ ‘Tain’t no reg’lar camp-fire,” he uttered. “The party we’re trailin’ never made it, ’cordin’ to them Osages. It’s the work of Injun herders; boys, like as not, to warm ’em while they watched the ponies. Village ought to be within two or three miles, at most.”

That was good news. The general gave the word to advance again, but more cautiously than ever. And taking Ned, as orderly, with his usual impulsiveness he rode forward accompanying the two Osage guides who had done so well.

The trail had left the stream, to cut across a big bend. The guides kept just at the head of the general’s horse. Whenever they came to a rise, one would creep forward and peer over. Seeing that the coast was clear, he would signal for the others to come on. Breathless work was this, and Ned’s heart thumped so that he feared he would be ordered to stay where he was. Now from the crest of a long brushy divide the Osage, reconnoitering, had put his hand to his brow, peering from under it. He crouched lower, and came hastily back. Something had been sighted.

“What is it?” asked the general, eagerly.

“Heaps Injuns down there,” grunted gutturally the Osage, at the saddle flaps. And he pointed ahead.

Off from his horse swung the general; he signed to Ned, and leaving their mounts in charge of the other Osage, with the first one they also stole forward.

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“Drop that sabre,” whispered the general to Ned, sternly. Ned unbuckled his belt and dropped it, with the dragging scabbard. He was making too much noise.

Low in the moonlight, peeping over the top of the ridge they scanned the valley before. About half a mile beyond, upon the snow which edged the timber skirting the icy stream was a large blackish mass, like a great mass of animals.

“Buffalo!” hazarded the general, after looking long and earnestly.

The Osage said not a word.

“Why do you think Indians?” whispered the general. “Maybe buffalo.”

The Osage shook his feathered head.

“No. Me heard dog bark,” he asserted, softly.

Again they listened. The freezing air was very quiet. Ned’s heart thumped; he wished that he need not breathe. Then, clear, through the night did sound the yappy bark of a dog, from the timber near the black mass.

“That’s right,” murmured the general. “Wait! Isn’t that a bell—a pony bell? Yes. Ponies those are. Buffalo aren’t in the habit of wearing bells in this country.”

He turned quickly, and took a step, to carry the news to the column. But he stopped short. The bell had ceased, no dog barked, but high and plaintive

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welled through the lonely waste the cry of a baby. Ned fairly started; it sounded so like home and fire-side. Of course, the Indians had their babies.

"That's tough," muttered the general. "Those Indians have not spared our women and children—but I wish that village held only men."

With Ned he hurried back to the scouts while the two Osages remained on lookout over the sleeping village.

"My compliments to the adjutant, and tell him to have all the officers join me here," he directed, to Ned. And Ned carried the message.

Speedily the word was passed, and from along the column filled with rumors the officers promptly gathered in a circle about their colonel.

"The village is ahead, about three quarters of a mile, gentlemen," spoke cautiously the general. "Remove your sabres, and come forward with me, as quietly as possible, and from the top of that rise yonder where the two Osages are I'll show you the lay of the land."

This they did, gladly. From the rise they reconnoitered, in a cautious knot. The pony herd was as plain as before; still ruled the lonely night; somewhere down there the Indian village slept. They believed that they could trace a collection of tipis.

After pointing and explaining, and receiving nods of understanding, the general as quietly withdrew. All followed.

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Now a council of war must be held, where the sabres had been left. California Joe listened approvingly; Little Beaver and Hard Rope anxiously, trying to comprehend the white chief's plan. The Osages had loosened their buffalo robes, as if prepared for instant action. But that was not the scheme.

The attack was to be made at dawn, as soon as there was light enough for aiming. The village was to be surrounded, first, and charged from four sides.

Now was it after midnight; the moon was floating high. At once set out, under cover of the ridge, with troops G, H and M, about 200 men, Major Joel Elliot, on wide circuit to take station whence he might charge the village from below; set out in the other direction, with B and F troops, Colonel William Thompson, to take similar position above.

“The attack will be made promptly at daylight, gentlemen,” were the general's last instructions. “The band will play Garryowen, and at the first note you will charge from whatever position you are in.”

The veteran Colonel Myers and his “right center” column might remain, until time to take their posts also, not so far away, on the right.

The fourth or “center” column was commanded by the general himself; but of the four companies, A, C, D and K, Captain Hamilton commanded the one squadron, Colonel West the other. And there were Lieutenant (Colonel) “Queen's Own” Cook's sharpshooters.

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Ah, but it was cold up here, behind the ridge. The time was two o'clock, and four hours must pass before daylight. Nobody might make a fire, and orders forbade stamping of the feet or walking up and down, because such a creaking of the snow might give alarm to the village.

The men, huddled in their overcoats, stood or crouched, each holding to the lines of his horse. The officers gathered in little knots, and sitting or standing, talked low.

The general's group was the largest: Adjutant Moylan, Lieutenant Tom Custer, Captain Hamilton, Colonel West, and others.

"It's been a long Thanksgiving day, and a fast instead of a feast," said Colonel West.

"Oh, we'll have our celebration later," quoth Lieutenant Tom. "You know the verse:

For gold the merchant plows the main,
The farmer plows the manor;
But glory is the soldier's prize,
The soldier's wealth is honor.

"How about it, Hamilton? Are you glad you came?" asked Lieutenant Moylan.

"Perfectly. The only person I'm sorry for is poor Mathey."

"He's liable to miss a rousing good fight."

"And one in which some of us are likely to get hurt. Those Indians will fight like demons, to defend their families and property."

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“Well, as for me, gentlemen, you know how I feel,” spoke young Captain Hamilton, earnestly. “I want the soldier’s death. When my hour comes, I hope that I shall be shot through the heart, in battle.”

By all the low talk, among men as among officers, the approaching battle must be regarded as a serious problem. Nobody might tell how many Indians were housed down below, on their own ground, with plenty of ammunition and food and cover; and no harder fighters could be found than the Cheyennes and the Kiowas.

The Osages, in their war-paint of red, white, black and yellow, sat under blankets and robes, in a circle, murmuring gravely as if they, too, were doubtful of the white chief’s ability. One of them was not in war-paint. His paint all was black, for mourning. The interpreter explained that this warrior had lost his squaw, to the Cheyennes, and that he could not wash off his mourning until he had taken a Cheyenne scalp.

Ned thought much upon the village. It probably would contain some white captives. Among them might be little Mary. He resolved to keep his eyes open for trace of anybody looking as she might look.

XVI

"GARRYOWEN" AND "CHARGE!"

WHILE dragged the cold hours, some of the officers threw the capes of their cavalry greatcoats over their heads, and stretched upon the snow, slept. The general, having finished his inspection, did likewise. But the Osages did not sleep; neither did the men of the ranks, now collected closer in groups at their horses' heads, to keep warm. The stag-hounds, Maida and Blucher, shivered and whined, and curled in a ball.

Beyond, upon the crest of the ridge, an Osage and two of the officers were keeping keen watch upon the unconscious village below.

Ned dozed; when he awakened, stiff and shivering, the moon had set, all was pitchy dark, except that far in the east just a tinge of grayness signaled the approach of dawn.

Somebody near Ned stirred, and struck a match. It was the general, who looked at his watch. The flickering light revealed his anxious face and moustache rimmed with frost. He stood, and bending over another sleeping form he said, low and earnest: "Moylan! Moylan!"

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“Yes, sir.” And the adjutant also sat up, to yawn, and spring to his feet.

“It’s time we were forming. Wake the officers,” continued the general. “Is that you, trumpeter?”

“Yes, sir,” answered Ned.

“You may help us. When you come to Colonel Myers, either of you, give him my compliments and tell him to move his command out at once and take position.”

“Yes, sir.”

Many of the officers already were awake, waiting, peering, listening. All around up-towered dim figures, and cautious voices spoke in undertones. Faint jingle sounded, as the horses stirred at movement of their guardians.

Presently into the darkness filed away Colonel Myers’ column, to take position further along on the right.

The troopers of the center column were not yet mounted; the companies in column of fours bided the time when the light from the east should be stronger.

Ned, beside his horse, quivered with cold and excitement mingled. All before was grim and silent; the ridge, snowy and blotched with brush, lay against the sky-line to the south; beyond the ridge was the fated village. Not even a dog barked.

Suddenly through the columns of fours ran a murmur. Into the velvet black sky over the ridge soared slowly and stately a fire signal, of yellow

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glow. Instantly through Ned's mind surged the thought that the village was alarmed, Major Elliot or Colonel Thompson had been detected, and this was a flaming arrow to spread the news adown the valley. Next would come the volleys, the shouts, and the shrieks.

"A rocket! A signal rocket!" ejaculated somebody.

"How long it hangs fire! Why doesn't it burst?" wondered Adjutant Moylan, impatient.

Up, and up, and up, in course majestic, it floated higher, changing from yellow to red, and from red to blue, and from blue to lemon. The columns watched, breathless, eye and ear set for the downward curve or the explosion. The general spoke, in tone glad.

"It's a star."

"Oh!" sighed officer and men, relaxed, as passed the word.

For a star it was, now flashing white across the white and black; a morning star beautiful beyond description, in this pure, still air. It seemed like an omen of peace, but it brooded over a scene of war.

The light in the east had widened. From mouth to mouth the order to advance was given; without bugle note the columns mounted and now with creak of snow began to climb the ridge. Down from the crest came the Osage and the two officers. The village still slept, unsuspecting.

The crest was reached. Every eye sought the

“GARRYOWEN” AND “CHARGE!”

village below. Its pointed tipis could be described, as thick as young cedars, on both sides of the curving stream. The pony herd was restless, at the approach of day following the long, biting night.

Here upon the crest was swiftly formed the line of battle, for the charge. Right and left into line rode the troopers, for squadron front; the right held by Colonel West, the left by Captain Hamilton and the Cook sharpshooters who were to fight on foot.

“Officers and men will remove their overcoats and the men their haversacks, to be left here under guard of one man from each company,” directed the general, tersely. “We must be free in our actions. Not a shot is to be fired before the charge is sounded. Keep those dogs here, too.”

So overcoats and haversacks were dropped; and stripped to their blouses the column again waited, breathing hard.

“For—r’d—march!” The low command trickled adown the long line; and more by sight than by hearing the line obeyed. From the crest it began to descend; and if all was going well, from three other points three other lines were as cautiously closing in on the doomed village.

The general led, in the center, with Adjutant Moylan beside him, Ned behind. A few paces off to the rear of the general’s right was Colonel West, commanding the right squadron. Captain Hamilton was on the left.

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“ Now, men, keep cool, wait the command, fire low and not too rapidly,” Ned heard him caution, in clear, calm tone.

Sergeant-Major Kennedy of the non-commissioned staff was another man in front of the line. Ned glimpsed him on the right.

Just before the center of the line, in close formation rode the band—every man with his instrument poised, the chief musician’s cornet at his lips, prepared to burst into “ Garryowen ” at first signal for attack.

The foot of the hill was reached; the pony herd stared, and jostled uneasily, scenting and hearing and seeing. With crackle of snow they moved aside—and as the crackle by the cavalry mingled with the crackle by their ponies, the village slept on, suspecting naught.

Now the timber ahead was the goal; for in the timber was the main collection of the lodges. A few, above and below, had been pitched on this side of the stream; but the majority were across, where the bank was low and level.

From the pony herd to the timber fringe was further than had been expected; as with crackle and slight jingle of sabre and bit the line moved in at eager walk, every man peering, all too fast brightened the landscape. The tipis glimmered white; from the apex of some curled thin smoke; very soon would the village awake to the routine of another day. How hard they slept—warrior and squaw and child and even dog!

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“ Another deserted village! ” whispered the general, to Adjutant Moylan.

The adjutant nodded. The general swept a glance along his line, right and left; he straightened more in the saddle, his right hand fell to the butt of his revolver, projecting from holster; evidently the time had come, and in a few moments would it be known whether this was indeed another abandoned village. Ned raised his bugle to his lips, for the “ Charge ”; but even while he was drawing breath, in readiness, smart and quick rang from the farther side of the village a single report of rifle! The alarm!

What a change burst upon the slumberous valley! Turned in his saddle the general; with a word his voice smote the band into action.

“ Garryowen! Give it to ’em! ”

No longer was there need for concealment. Quite the opposite. Shattering the icy air, pink with nearing dawn, into full cry blared the doughty band. The men cheered wildly; back from the hills beyond the fated village hastened like an echo other cheers.

“ Trot—march! ”

The line of squadrons, irregular as they surged through the low brush, broke into the trot. Sabres jingled, saddles creaked; carbines were at the “ Advance,” butt on thigh, muzzle up; and the sharpshooters must run.

The trees were close before. The tipis were plain. Dark figures were darting among them. Dogs barked

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furiously. From the other side of the village pealed a rattling volley of carbines, and spread to a steady clatter.

The general stood in his stirrups; he whirled Dandy about, and swung high his cap above his yellow hair. Over the clamor of band and of cheer his voice rose exultant.

“Charge!”

This was enough. Ned glued his lips to that old bugle and from puffed cheeks forced his very soul into the wild stirring notes of the “Charge.” On right and on left the company bugles answered. Forward sprang the horses, awaiting no spur.

Ned was conscious that the band had dropped back through an interval of the squadron behind; they raced on past it; but it continued to play.

Our hearts so stout have got us fame,
For soon 'tis known from whence we came;
Where'er we go they dread the name
Of Garryowen in glory.

More savagely cheered the men. Sergeant-Major Kennedy (fine soldier) had drawn up almost even with the general and the adjutant. They rode with revolvers held aloft, to be brought down to the deadly level. Ned blew over and over the “Charge”—the bugle in his left hand, but his revolver in his right.

Now they struck the first trees, bordering the stream and housing the sprinkling of tipis on this side. Out from the tipis were bursting men and women—

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the men half naked, weapons in their grasp, the women scurrying with their frightened children. They saw the galloping line of blue, and swerved for shelter of tree and stream. The Indian rifles cracked venomously into the very faces of the horses. Ned thought that he saw, with the corner of his eye, Captain Hamilton pitch sideways from his saddle. But the Custer revolver, and the revolvers of his companions jetted smoke, and with a roar the carbines of the troopers drowned every noise, almost every thought save the thought of fight.

Back were swept the Indians—warriors dodging, women and children fleeing. Driven from their white lodges, many warriors were standing waist-deep in the frozen stream; others fought from cover of the high bank; others from the trees and the brush. It was hot, fast work. Even the squaws were using rifle and bow. Some fell, like the warriors, shot down in the act of bitter defence. It could not be avoided. Ned fired right and left, but whether he hit anybody he did not know.

Now the line was well into the first collection of tipis, and at the stream. On the other side the battle was raging fiercely; and into the stream plunged the reckless squadron, their line disorganized but still resistless. Among the tipis opposite reared a single tipi of black, which must be the tipi of the chief, old Black Kettle. But old Black Kettle was lying stark, shot down by the rapidly riding Koom-la-Manche.

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The battle had developed into a fight-at-will—into quick shooting among the tipis and the trees, cleaning them out. The village was quickly cleaned, but the struggle had only begun. In the village were now the troops; the Indians were outside; their whoops and their firing waxed ever more furious. The Osage scouts dashed hither-thither, answering whoop with whoop. Little Beaver's face was convulsed like a demon's. Sighting him, Ned almost fired upon him, but stayed his hand just in time. In the *melée* 'twas hard to tell friend from foe.

Driven in by the cordon of troopers, still the trapped Cheyennes made desperate rushes, to gain cover. On a sudden Ned's eyes, roving rapidly among the tipis, were halted short by a new sight: a little white girl running! A little white girl—in fringed buckskins and in moccasins; but yet a little white girl, her long light hair floating over her shoulders. With a startled shout of "Look!" and with jab of spur, Ned dashed for her.

"Mary!" he called. "Mary! Here I am! Mary!"

But how could his voice be heard, amidst the hubbub of shot and cheer and whoop!

The fight was every man for himself, and all together to keep the Indians from breaking away. The grove was a pandemonium. Ned had dashed forward alone. He passed the first of the tipis in his path; and there came Mary, fluttering bravely, dodging hard;



THE BIG INDIAN WAS A FAIR MARK, BUT THE BULLET MUST NOT
HIT MARY

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behind, his hand even now outstretched, his countenance scowling evilly, was a large Indian warrior. Cut Nose? Maybe. Who he was did not matter.

Again Ned shouted, and spurred Buckie. He leaned, and thrust forward his revolver, to pull trigger. The big Indian was a fair mark, at the short range; but of course the bullet must not hit Mary. Now she had stumbled on a tent peg, and was down. But Buckie was almost upon her; so was the Indian. Strung bow, with arrow fitted, was in his hand, as he ran; he was quick-witted, for at token of Ned on Buckie disputing his claim his arrow was instantly at his eye, bow-string drawn to an arc, and iron point leveled at Ned's breast.

Ned scarcely had time to check Buckie, fling himself to one side, and pull trigger. He was conscious that the twang of the bow and the bark of his Colt's sounded together. Then a terrific blow in the face blinded him with starry red, and sent him dizzily reeling down, down. His feet slipped from the stirrups, and he landed in a heap.

He must not stay there. His head was numb with the shock, but his mind worked frenziedly. What was happening to Mary? What would happen to himself? The great fear of the scalping-knife and of the tearing by cruel hands stung him more than did the pain now increasing. He squirmed to his knees, revolver cocked, and tried hard to see. Before his one eye the tipis swam vaguely. Was he here alone? Where

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were the other troopers? Was that light spot Mary? Was Cut Nose coming? Or did the big Indian lie huddled upon the trampled snow at the base of the tipi on the right, his outstretched fingers touching the little girl figure whose face was hidden in her arms!

Fast Ned crawled across, revolver ready. The big Indian did not stir; in one hand his bow was clutched splintered; under him the snow was reddening. Ned threw aside his wild-beast caution.

“Mary!” he called. “Get up. Quick.”

She raised her head, and stared, startled, blue eyes wide.

“Who are you?” she quavered.

“I’m Ned. I’m brother Ned. I’ll save you.”

“Oh, Ned!” she cried, scrambling to him. “You’re hurt! You’ve got an arrow sticking right in your head.”

Ned put up his hand, in haste to feel. His fingers met the feathered end of an arrow, jutting from his face. An excruciating pain sped through his head and down his back; and frightened, he fainted.

XVII

AFTER THE BATTLE

NED did not stay unconscious long. He was half-conscious. He dimly heard the pleading voice of little Mary, he felt her caresses, he was aware that the shots and the shouts and the whoops continued, he felt the throbbing pain of his wound, he felt himself lifted and carried, lax, and deposited again; and he felt a sharper, sickening agony as fingers manipulated the arrow, while a kindly voice soothed him. That must be the surgeon, Dr. Lippincott.

He shut his lips firmly, not even to groan. It was the part of the soldier to bear pain; and if he was only a boy, he also was a soldier. A "snip" sounded, upon the arrow, and for a moment the shock was almost too much to stand. Then the shaft was gently but firmly slipped from the hole. The surgeon had cut off the head and had drawn the arrow out backward, for the point was of course barbed.

"You'll do nicely, my lad," spoke the surgeon. "It's only a flesh wound. It followed outside the skull. Good!"

Soft touch applied a bandage.

"Can't you see, Ned? Please see!" implored little Mary.

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Ned rallied and opened his one eye. He was bolstered up, on a heap of buffalo-robcs. Mary was trying to hug him. He hugged Mary. They were in an open space amidst the tipis, where the field hospital had been established. Around-about them were other wounded soldiers. Colonel Barnitz was lying near, as pale as if dead. Doctor Lippincott and his assistants were busy here and there.

The rattle of rifle and carbine, the quick orders, the defiant yells, betokened desperate battle. The strains of "Garryowen" sounded wild and inspiring, as the band, posted on a little knoll by the village, played on and on. But higher, more piercing, penetrating all the clamor, not unlike the howl of wolves rose an incessant chant—the mourning wail of sorrowing squaws.

The charge had been successful. The troops had the village. Now the surrounding hills were alive with Indians; the soldiers were in the center; and the day was not yet noon.

Rapidly came the news, brought in by the wounded, or drifting in hap-hazard from hurrying fighters. Captain Hamilton had been killed—shot through the heart in battle, just as he had desired as a soldier's end. Bluff Colonel Alfred Barnitz was desperately wounded by a ball through the body. Lieutenant Colonel Tom Custer had been wounded, and Lieutenant March. Nothing had been seen, since the first

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attack, of Major Elliot or Sergeant-Major Kennedy. Black Kettle and Chief Little Rock were slain. Major Benteen had encountered Black Kettle's young son, not fourteen years of age, and after being fired upon repeatedly by him and having his horse shot under him, had been obliged to shoot back and kill the gallant young warrior. Squaws and children had fought wickedly, helping the warriors. One squaw, fleeing with a captive little white boy, had stabbed him rather than surrender him. She had been shot down at once; but too late. Romeo the interpreter had gathered the captive squaws into a large tipi, and California Joe had herded nine hundred ponies. This was the Cheyenne village, with a few Arapaho and Sioux tipis in it. But one of the squaws had informed the general (who was unharmed) that below the Cheyenne village extended for ten miles the villages of the Kiowas and of the Comanches, more Cheyennes, the Arapahos, and some Apaches. Aroused by runners and by the noise of conflict, these warriors were rallying by the hundreds to the attack and the rescue.

Captain Smith came riding hastily through; by the motions of his hand he was counting the tipis; and he was in a hurry because every now and then some angry squaw shot at him.

"Fifty-one," he called, to an orderly.

General Custer himself appeared, flushed and energetic, on Dandy plashed with froth and frozen mud and water.

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"Hello," he cried, at sight of Ned. "Hurt?"

"Yes, sir," and Ned tried to salute."

"Bullet?"

"No, sir. Arrow."

"It didn't go through his head," piped little Mary, bravely. "It just stuck there."

"I've found my sister, sir," informed Ned, eager to let him know.

"Good!" And the busy general turned to other matters. His eagle glance measured the hospital. "You must get ready to move out of here, doctor," he said. "We sha'n't stay."

"All right, general."

And the Yellow Hair dashed away.

More and more Indians were gathering upon the ridges around the village. The head-dresses of the warriors could be seen. Word came that the overcoats and the haversacks which had been left by the center column when it advanced were captured and that the guard was obliged to scud hard for escape. Blucher the stag-hound had run out among the Indians, thinking that they were yelling for a hunt; and now he stiffened up there, with an arrow through him. Maida had not been hurt.

That was bad, to lose the overcoats and the haversacks of rations—although of course here in the village was plenty of furs and food. But what of the supply train, which Lieutenant Mathey was bringing on? From the hills the Indians would soon sight it, and

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while a thousand of them fought the cavalry, another thousand would attack the eighty men guarding the wagons.

The warriors surrounding the village did not seem ready to storm it and retake it; while a circle of the troopers, dismounted, kept them at long range, field squads sought among the tipis for the dead and the wounded on both sides.

A lull had occurred in the fighting. Now 200 soldiers were set at work heaping high the plunder from the tipis, and tearing the tipis down, to burn them. General Custer, in plain view, on restless Dandy, delivering rapid orders right and left to his aides, received report of the battle results.

There were 875 ponies and mules; 241 saddles, some (as could be seen in the pile gathered) very finely decorated; 573 dressed buffalo robes—some of these, also, very fine; 390 lodge hides; 160 raw robes, untanned; thirty-five bows, thirty-five revolvers, forty-seven rifles, 360 axes and hatchets, twelve shields, seventy-five lances, ninety bullet molds, thirty-five pounds of powder, 1050 pounds of lead, 300 pounds of bullets, 4000 arrows and arrow-heads, 470 Government blankets, ninety-three coats, 775 hide lariats or picket-ropes, 940 skin saddle-bags, 700 pounds of tobacco, and moccasins and dried meat and flour and so forth.

One hundred and three Indians had been killed, including sixteen chiefs; three squaws and a boy and

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two girls had been wounded; fifty-three were prisoners. Captain Hamilton had been killed, and three other soldiers; Colonel Barnitz, Colonel Tom Custer, Lieutenant March, and eleven men wounded; Major Elliot and Sergeant-Major Kennedy and fourteen men were still missing. It was rumored that they had pursued some Indians escaping down the stream.

After a few things had been picked out, to keep, the piles of lodges and belongings were set on fire. At sight of the flames, from the Indians upon the hills swelled a great cry of rage, and down they came, in party after party, charging the cavalry lines. The general ordered his mounted squadrons to charge back. Outfought, the Indians were forced to open a way wherever led the guidons. Thus breathing space was again given.

The whole column was being put in marching formation. The hospital had been broken—when now from the column's rear sounded sharp volleys, and continued heavy firing.

An attack? Or was it Major Elliot and men cutting their way through to join their comrades? Or was it the supply train, in peril? No. Swiftly passed the word that the general had directed that all the captured ponies and mules be shot, except those needed to carry the prisoners. Eight hundred were being killed, by four companies detailed to do the firing.

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This was cruel, but necessary in war. What could the column do, with all those wild ponies and mules? The Indians would fight fiercely to retake them; the Indians would be badly crippled, without them. So the general had set his heart hard, and had given the order. When the firing ceased, all the column was glad, for killing horses is not soldiers' work.

Major Elliot and his fifteen had not been heard from. To delay and seek them might mean the loss of the whole column and of the supply train. How thick the Indians were swarming! Kiowa, Comanche, Arapaho and Apache and Cheyenne, in their war-dress they were rallying to avenge their fellows. Upon the tops of the hills they had posted lookouts, to watch the country around about, and the next movement of the invaders.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon. The battle had lasted nine hours. At signal from the general pealed clear and defiant the bugle call of "Advance"; "For—r'd—march!" sounded the command.

The worst wounded, and the body of Captain Hamilton wrapped in a blanket, were in the ambulance. Ned could ride his horse; and beside him rode upon a pony little Mary, with her Indian finery and her white girl face and hair. The Osage scouts bearing many scalps—the mourning warrior now in war-paint like the rest—led; the captive squaws and children, on ponies, under guard closed in at the rear. Skirmishers rode the flanks.

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Thus, in close order, with flags streaming and band playing, as if to attack the other villages down the stream forth from the battle-field and the lodge ashes marched all boldly the Seventh Cavalry.

Away hastened the Indians, to rescue what they could before the merciless Chief with the Long Yellow Hair should strike there also. They went scurrying down the valley, and the most of them disappeared. But the Yellow Hair was wily. When darkness fell, without having attacked the other villages he turned his men about, and on the back trail marched fast until two in the morning. The men without overcoats or haversacks suffered. Colonel West was sent on to meet the wagon train and reinforce it; the rest of the column camped about huge fires, here in the valley of the Washita ere yet the trail veered off for the Canadian, northward.

The Osages hung their captured scalps to a pole in front of their fire, and discharged several volleys over them. Highest of all was hung Black Kettle's grayed scalp, the prize of the proud young brave Koom-la-Manche.

This shooting, explained California Joe, who knew everything, was done to drive away the spirits of old Black Kettle and the others, who would be hovering about, trying to take their scalps back again.

California Joe was in great glee, and talked constantly.

"Fightin'?" he demanded, for general answer.

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"Call that fightin'? I call it jest reg'larly wipin' out the varmints. Yes, an' sich a one as they won't hev agin, I tell ye. I rather 'spec' now them Injuns would be powerful glad to call it quits for a spell."

Joe seemed to be right, for morning broke clear, cold, but peaceful. At noon the wagon-train was met safe and whole. Hurrah for blankets and tents and supplies.

That night California Joe and Jack Corbin rode off with dispatches announcing to General Sheridan the battle of the Washita. 'Twould be a long perilous ride, across the miles of hostile wintry country.

The wounded were doing well. Even Colonel Barnitz, who was thought to be mortally wounded, had survived all the jolting and according to the reports of Doctor Lippincott was likely to recover. Ned's head of course ached considerably, and he could not blow his bugle or use the eye on the bandaged side, but he was able to ride, and soon would be as good as new—save for the scar. He and Mary had much to talk about.

When Camp Supply was almost in sight, California Joe and Corbin and another scout came riding with answering dispatches from headquarters. Joe and Jack had gone through in thirty-six hours, traveling mostly by night; here they were again.

That evening at guard-mount, with all the troops in line, by direction of General Custer, Adjutant Moylan read the dispatch received from General

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Sheridan: "General Field Orders No. 6," dated "Headquarters Department of the Missouri, in the Field, Depot on the North Canadian, at the Junction of Beaver Creek, Indian Territory, November 29, 1868."

It officially announced the defeat "by the Seventh regiment of cavalry, of a large force of Cheyenne Indians, under the celebrated chief Black Kettle, re-enforced by the Arapahos under Little Raven, and the Kiowas under Satanta, on the morning of the 27th instant, on the Washita River, near the Antelope Hills, Indian Territory;" and, like all such official reports of engagements in the army or navy it told the losses and the gains. But the last paragraph, read by Adjutant Moylan in voice emphatic, was what brought from the ranks the cheers:

"The energy and rapidity shown during one of the heaviest snow-storms that has visited this section of the country, with the temperature below freezing point, and the gallantry and bravery displayed, resulting in such signal success, reflect the highest credit upon both the officers and men of the Seventh Cavalry; and the Major-General commanding, while regretting the loss of such gallant officers as Major Elliot and Captain Hamilton, who fell while gallantly leading their men, desires to express his thanks to the officers and men engaged in the battle of the Washita, and his special congratulations are tendered to their distinguished commander, Brevet Major-General George A. Custer, for the efficient and gallant services rendered, which have characterized the opening of the campaign against the hostile Indians south of the Arkansas.

"By command of

"Major-General P. H. SHERIDAN."

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“Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!” cheered the ranks. It was good to be appreciated by such a soldier as Phil Sheridan.

Word was sent ahead by courier, that the next day the expedition would enter Camp Supply, and soon everybody knew that the entry was to be made in style. There was a busy evening and early morning applied to scouring weapons and buttons and patching clothing.

The day was beautiful. The sun shone bright, the snow had melted, the air felt warm. Just at noon the head of the column topped the ridge below which lay Camp Supply. The glad firing of rifles, by the Osages, who led, announced that the camp was in sight.

Over the crest of the ridge, and down the long sunny slope into the tent-dotted valley marched as for review the victorious eight hundred. General Sheridan and his staff, in full dress, were waiting, posted on their horses where the column would pass.

First rode on their prancing ponies the Osage scouts. They and their ponies were brightly painted and fluttered with strips of red and blue, with feathers and trinkets; they had donned their gayest finery; from their spears dangled scalps—the spear of young Koom-la-Manche waving the scalp of Black Kettle. As they rode they brandished their weapons, they fired their guns, and sung wild songs of triumph. Little Beaver led. He tried to sit stiff and proud;

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but once he must beat his swelling chest and cry loudly: "They call us Americans. We are more. We are Osages!"

Behind rode in a line the white scouts, they also proud, but California Joe on his old mule smoking his black pipe as usual.

Then came the Indian families, gazing curiously, some of the squaws and children three on a pony, many in blankets scarlet and blue.

Then rode the general and his staff. After them marched the band playing "Garryowen." In columns of platoons followed the troops, rank by rank, their officers in command.

Higher rose the yells and chants of the Osages; faster California Joe puffed his pipe; more stirring played the band. Weapons sparkled, the bright blankets and the Indian ornaments of silver and copper gleamed, the sabres flashed in a "present," as rank after rank the victorious column passed in review before General Sheridan, repeatedly lifting his cap.

Not the least prominent in the ceremony were Ned and the other wounded, who felt themselves heroes all.

When the Seventh had gone into camp, here at the rendezvous again, there was a great time of congratulations and shaking of hands. That night the Osages gave a tremendous scalp dance, which lasted until morning and kept many people awake.

XVIII

TO THE LAND OF THE DAKOTAH

THE Seventh went into camp about half a mile up Beaver Creek from the log stockade of Fort Supply. On the third day after, the body of Captain Louis McLane Hamilton was laid to rest under some cottonwoods on the bank of the creek. It was a solemn and tender military funeral; with muffled drums and slow march by the band, and in the ambulance a rude board casket covered with the American flag, and behind the ambulance the captain's horse, draped with a black cloth, and bearing the empty saddle and the cavalry boots upside down. Over the grave were fired three volleys; Odell sounded "Taps."

The Nineteenth Kansas Volunteers had at last struggled in, after losing by cold and starvation almost all their horses. General Sheridan had been waiting only for the Kansas soldiers, before he should start out himself, with General Custer and all, upon another winter march against the Indians. And he hoped to get some news of Major Elliot and fifteen men.

However, it was decided to send the prisoners and the wounded up to Fort Hays; and as Ned was not

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yet fit for duty (the arrow had made two large holes, one over his left eye, where it had gone in, and the other over his left ear, where it had come out), up to Fort Hays must he go. Little Mary of course went, too.

On the seventh of December, scarce a week after the Seventh had marched in, out marched again the famous "pony-soldiers," together with the infantry or "walk-a-heaps." General Sheridan, whom the Indians styled "Little-Big-Short-Man-Ride-Fast," accompanied the column, but "Old Curly" ("Creeping Panther," "Strong Arm," "Long Yellow Hair") was in command. They headed into the southward. For the northward trailed the invalids and the Cheyenne prisoners, under escort.

From the field reports came regularly through to Fort Hays. On the march southward the battle-field of the Washita had been revisited. Two miles below the Black Kettle village were discovered, in one little space of frozen ground, the disfigured bodies of the lost Major Elliot and Sergeant-Major Kennedy, and the fourteen others. Piles of cartridge shells showed that they had fought staunchly until one by one they had fallen. The Indians hastening to the rescue of Black Kettle must have surrounded them.

The Comanches and Apaches gathered upon the reservation. Satanta and Lone Wolf the Kiowa war-chief, were captured, and all the Kiowas came in. So did the Arapahos. And after to the Strong Arm,

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as they now called the general, they had surrendered two young white women, Mrs. Wilson and Miss White, so did the most of the Cheyennes.

The campaign had been a success; the battle of the Washita had shattered the tribes of the Southwest Plains.

Upon a bright day in March, 1869, to the tune of "Garryowen" the travel-worn Seventh Cavalry rode blithely home into Fort Hays. They brought more Cheyenne prisoners, and more tales.

A new officer was in command at Fort Hays. He was General Nelson A. Miles, just appointed colonel of the crack Fifth Infantry, but in the Civil War he had been a cavalry officer. He sent out his Fifth Infantry band (a good one) to greet the Seventh, and with "Garryowen" to escort it into camp.

Clad all in buckskin, and still wearing his wide-collared blue shirt with the stars on the points, and his crimson necktie, General Custer led, on Dandy. He had grown a beard, during the winter; of bright red, and not very handsome. Clad in buckskin were many of the officers. The wagons were laden with trophies of robe and shield and embroidered shirt and savage weapon. California Joe smoked his black pipe.

Now back beside Big Creek, near to Fort Hays, where they had camped in the early summer of 1867, the Seventh Cavalry might enjoy a long rest; for the plains were quiet.

Mrs. Custer had hastened out from Fort Leaven-

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worth, where she had been waiting; came with her, to join the "gin'nel," Eliza the cook and Henry, negro coachman. Came wives of other officers. Mrs. Miles, married only a year, already was at the post.

It looked as if the Indian troubles were over. Only in the north the powerful Sioux were independent of the white man. But they had their own great region wherein to roam, and wherein white people were forbidden.

Ned's wound had rapidly healed. Little Mary was placed with a kind family at Leavenworth. The Seventh were quartered at Fort Leavenworth for the winter of 1869-1870; they spent the following summer on the plains, in scouting and other routine work, varied by buffalo hunting, and in March, of 1871, they were transferred to Kentucky and South Carolina. Here, at small posts, they were to help break up unauthorized whiskey manufactories, and a secret society called the Ku Klux Klan, which interfered with the rights of Northern citizens and negroes. This was not soldierly work such as serving on the plains, and the Seventh did not feel particularly pleased.

The scouts, too, were well scattered. California Joe had disappeared. Reports said that he had gone into the mountains. Wild Bill Hickok had been attacked by some unruly soldiers, and as a result of his terrible defence with his deadly weapons he had been obliged to leave Hays. He had become marshal at Abilene—another rough and ready town, further

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east on the railroad. Romeo had married into the Cheyennes, with whom he was living. Buffalo Bill Cody was attached to the Fifth Cavalry.

As for Ned, it seemed to him that he ought to stay near Mary. So he was granted his discharge (with honor) from the army, and found a Government position in the quartermaster department at Fort Leavenworth. Here he might mingle with the soldier life that he loved, and also watch after Mary. She was doing finely, and growing into a large girl.

Once Ned caught a glimpse of the general, when in the spring of 1872, the general was returning from a big buffalo hunt on the plains with the Grand Duke Alexis of Russia. Custer had been assigned as his escort, by General Sheridan. Buffalo Bill had been the guide. The hunt was a great success, and the Grand Duke was much pleased.

Another year passed—and suddenly spread the news that the Seventh Cavalry were once more to take the field. They were ordered to assemble and as a regiment together to proceed to Fort Rice, among the Sioux of Dakota Territory.

That news was enough for Ned. It set his blood to tingling, it set his thoughts to dancing, it filled his eyes with pictures of camp and of march and of an alert, lithe, soldierly figure whose keen blue eyes and long yellow hair and clarion voice no boy ever could forget, any more than he could forget the cavalry guidons waving in the charge.

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Ned re-enlisted, with request that he be assigned again to the Seventh. And as he was a "veteran," and as the Seventh needed more men, for field service, he was ordered to report to his regiment at Omaha. There, the middle of March, with a few genuine recruits he was waiting at the station when in pulled the first section of the long train which bore the famous Seventh Cavalry, en route from the States to the best-beloved frontier.

Out from the cars boiled the blue blouses and the yellow stripes! There was the general—first, as usual. He was wearing the regulation fatigue uniform, instead of buckskin; he had cut his hair; he seemed whiter than when on the plains: but he was the same quick, bold, active spirit. And there was Mrs. Custer, with other ladies. And there was "Queen's Own" Cook—and Lieutenant Tom—and Captain Benteen—and all the old officers, and several new ones. And there, poking out of the car windows and thrust from the steps, were familiar faces and forms of comrades.

Ned must report to the adjutant, who proved to be Lieutenant Calhoun. Then might he be greeted by friends. He even had the pleasure of saluting the general, and having his hand shaken while the general, and Mrs. Custer, asked about himself and about Mary, and said that they were glad to have him back again. Finally he found Odell, who was in the band; and from Odell might he receive all the news.

"No more chasin' moonshiners and playin' police-

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man for the Sivinth, b'gorry," declared Odell. "You were well out of it, me boy; an' now you've joined us jist in time. As soon as we get to Yankton of Dakota, which be the end o' the railroad, then 'tis 'Boots and Saddles' once more in earnest, with a six hundred mile march ahead of us. Faith, won't it seem good! An' 'tis what we're all nadin'. We're soft."

"Wonder what we'll do up in Dakota," invited Ned, bluffly. "Scout around and watch the Sioux?"

"Well, they'll warrant watchin', or I'm mistaken," retorted Odell. "People may think this little war we had with the Cheyennes was good fightin'. But I tell ye, up there in the Dakota country there be waitin' some fights to make the battle of the Washita seem like a skirmish. Forty thousand Sioux, in a big country they know and we don't know, won't be ousted in a hurry. I tell ye, these Sioux people are the biggest Injun con-fidderation on the continent. There's no nonsense about 'em."

"But what's the trouble, anyhow?" ventured to ask one of the recruits. "Whose country it is?"

"The Sioux'," answered Odell. "Sure; it belongs to the Sioux. In Sixty-eight didn't the Government agree by treaty to close the wagon road through it and quit the forts in the Powder River country, and give it to the Sioux forever? And already aren't the white men sneakin' in whenever they get the chance, and miners bound to explore the Black Hills;

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and with the Northern Pacific Railroad reachin' Bismarck, Dakota, 'tis not a wagon road but an iron road that be threatenin' to cross the sacred soil. With that, and the rotten rations served out at the agencies, I don't blame the Injuns for complainin'. Faith, I may fight 'em, but they have my sympathies."

"What kind of a country is that, up north?" asked the recruit.

"Well, 'tis a bad-lands and butte country, broken to washes, with the Black Hills mountains in the southwest corner and the Powder River and Yellowstone regions beyant. The Sivinth may think the Kansas plains blew hot and cold, bedad; but up yonder is a stretch where it's nine months winter and three months late in the fall, and the wind blows the grass up by the roots."

Again a cavalry trumpeter, Ned was assigned to B Troop, Lieutenant Tom's. Of course, Ned could not expect to be the general's favorite orderly, again; at least, not right away. He was a man, and must serve his turn, like the other men. But being one of the dashing, light-hearted Tom Custer's trumpeters was next thing to being the general's.

Lieutenant Calhoun had married Miss Margaret Custer, the general's sister. She and Mrs. Custer rode with the general and his staff, at the head of the column. Down in Kentucky the general had collected many more dogs; and had bought a thoroughbred horse named Vic to be companion to faithful Dandy.

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Eliza the black cook had not come, this time ; but there was another negress cook, named Mary, and a negro coachman, named Ham, for the traveling carriage to which Mrs. Custer and Mrs. Calhoun sometimes changed.

In long, long column of twos followed by the white-topped army wagons the Seventh Cavalry threaded its way northward across the sagey Dakota plains, the willows and cottonwoods of the muddy Missouri ever in sight.

XIX

SCOUTING AMONG THE SIOUX

FORT RICE was located ten miles above the mouth of the Cannon-Ball River and twenty miles below the new town of Bismarck. Around-about the slate-colored frame buildings stretched the sagey Dakota plains, seemingly vaster and barer even than the rolling buffalo plains of Kansas. Butte and coulée or dry wash broke them; the only trees were along the water courses. The winds were fresh and strong, the short summers hot, the long winters cold. It was a country that bred strong, hardy, robust men and women, and such were the Sioux—the proud Dakota nation.

The Northern Pacific Railroad from St. Paul had reached Bismarck, and was determined to push on across Dakota and Montana, as the Union Pacific had pushed on across Nebraska and Wyoming. Scarcely had the Seventh Cavalry been welcomed at Fort Rice, when they prepared to take the long trail again, as escort to protect the engineers surveying a route westward for the railroad.

So when the Northern Pacific Railroad engineers started upon their survey westward still, their escort numbered almost 2000 soldiers: of the Seventh

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Cavalry, of infantry, of artillery, and of Indian scouts, all under Major-General D. S. Stanley, with General Custer the "Long Hair" in command of the ten companies of the Seventh.

It was to be a march clear across western Dakota to the Yellowstone River of Montana. Few white men had seen this country.

The Indian scouts were not the faithful Osages or Kaws. They were Arikaras; a war-like tribe of smaller numbers than the southern Indians; their head scout was Bloody Knife. They hated the Sioux, and so did the Crows of Montana. The Sioux long had fought the Arikaras, and nowadays were constantly invading the country of the Crows, for scalps and horses.

With the Seventh were Dr. James Honzinger, the fat, bald-headed old veterinary surgeon of the regiment, and Mr. Baliran who was the post sutler. They were not enlisted men but were civilian employees, and accompanied the expedition as an outing. The general took Mary the black cook, for his mess.

It required a month of marching before, July 19, the Yellowstone River in Montana was reached. It had seemed much like old times, with the general leading on Dandy or Vic, in his fringed buckskins, his fringed gauntlets, his broad-brimmed hat, his blue shirt and crimson tie, and high, red-topped boots; the hounds galloping right and left, and plenty of hunting.

The engineer party, and the scientists who were

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along, must move slowly, taking many notes. Dr. Honzinger and Mr. Baliran insisted upon straggling and riding apart from the column, picking up specimens. They were warned that this was dangerous practice, but they did not heed, and refused even to carry any weapons.

Near where the Powder River empties into the Yellowstone the general took Captain Moylan's company and Lieutenant Tom's company, and Bloody Knife the Arikara scout, to explore the route ahead. No Indians had yet been sighted; but now, after a mile or two, Bloody Knife, stopping short, examining the ground, signed: "Indians have passed here."

So they had: nineteen Sioux, by the fresh sign. They must have been reconnoitering the camp, and had traveled on to inform the main company of warriors.

Nevertheless, on rode the little squadron, until from the bluffs along the Yellowstone, green before them lay the beautiful valley of the Tongue River flowing up from the south. The general gave orders to make camp in a clump of cottonwood trees, and to wait for the column. With horses unsaddled and unbitted and staked out, and pickets posted, the command stretched out upon the ground for a rest. Most of the officers loosened their clothing and prepared to nap.

Ned was nodding, half asleep, when breaking the

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perfect calm, starting everybody with a jump, spoke the "Bang! Bang!" of the pickets' carbines.

"Indians!" were shouting the pickets' voices.

The camp was on its feet, peering and blinking. The pickets were kneeling and aiming; and beyond them, across the open valley were riding for the tethered horses a short line of painted horsemen.

"To your horses, men! Quick! To your horses! Run!" The command of the general was as sharp as the crack of a whip. Shoeless and hatless and coatless he stood, rifle in hand.

There were only half a dozen Indians in sight. Evidently they had intended to stampede the mounts; but they had reckoned without their host. The Seventh Cavalry had met Indians before. Out rushed the troopers, to grasp the lariats of the horses, and to reinforce the picket-line. And stopping short, the squad of Indians only raced back and forth, beyond range, gesturing as if inviting the soldiers to come and get them. Sioux they were, by their war-dress and action, said Bloody Knife, his eyes flaming hatred and disdain.

Now was it "Boots and Saddles" and "Mount." The general took Adjutant Calhoun and Lieutenant Tom and twenty men, including Ned the trumpeter, and galloped forth boldly; Captain Moylan was to follow.

The six Sioux easily kept out of reach. As anybody ought to know, they were only trying cunningly

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to lead the white chief on, into an ambuscade. So continued the chase, up the grassy green valley.

"I'll take my orderly and ride ahead, Tom," presently called the general. "Perhaps that will develop those rascals' plan. You follow at about two hundred yards interval, ready to rush in."

The general was on his Kentucky horse Vic. Sergeant Butler his orderly had a good horse, too. But the Indians would not let even them close in, with the other soldiers so near at hand. They were smart, these six Sioux, and knew what they were about.

A patch of timber was before to the left. The general had halted; also halted the six Indians. The general rode in a circle, for a parley; the six Indians paid no attention. Now here came Sergeant Butler, back with a message from the general. He saluted Lieutenant Tom.

"The general's compliments, and he would suggest that you keep a sharp eye on that bunch of trees, yonder," said the sergeant.

"Very well," responded Lieutenant Tom.

Sergeant Butler galloped off.

"In my opinion, that brush is full of Sioux, and those six bucks would be only too glad to lead us past," said Adjutant Calhoun, to Lieutenant Tom.

"The general had better join us or we him," answered the lieutenant, gazing anxiously. "He's too near. He's liable——" but from all the detachment issued a sudden cry.

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The six Sioux had wheeled, and were charging, and from the timber patch had burst, as if at a breath, fully three hundred others. At full speed they came, whooping and firing, and in splendid line. Evidently these Sioux were fine warriors.

All eyes leaped to the general. Around he had whirled, around had whirled the sergeant, and back they were spurring for dear life. They were three hundred yards from the timber, almost opposite to them, and two hundred yards from the soldiers.

On sped the line of Sioux, dividing, part to head off the general, part to ride to rear of the detachment and head off Captain Moylan, coming from behind.

“Prepare to fight on foot!” It was Lieutenant Tom’s clear voice.

From the saddle swung three men from each squad, leaving Number Four to hold the horses.

“As skirmishers, men! Quick!” and “Company—halt!” issued the commands. There was no time for regulation orders. Out in front of the horses had run the dismounted men, to halt in loose line, kneel, and without waiting for more orders, to aim.

“Don’t fire, men, until I give the word,” spoke Lieutenant Tom, revolver in hand, behind the line. “Aim low.”

Racing in toward one another the Sioux, and the general and Sergeant Butler, seemed about to join. But the general and the sergeant were beating. They would arrive first. Good!

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The Sioux were well within range. Their war-paint and their feathers showed plain. There were enough of them to ride over the little line of cavalry and trample it to death. Ned, revolver drawn as he knelt at the rear of the line, felt himself trembling, although he was not afraid. Out rang the voice of Lieutenant Tom.

“Let them have it!”

“Crash!” belched the fifteen carbines. And with smart rattle as chambers opened, closed, reloaded they belched again: “Crash!” Through the smoke Indian horsemen were reeling and falling, ponies were sprawling or galloping wildly; and away to either side were scampering the Sioux warriors.

“Bang! Bang-bang! Bang!” for the third time roared the carbines. “Hooray! Yah! Yah!” cheered loudly the soldiers. With answering cheer up raced at full speed the support of Captain Moylan. Breathing hard, his eyes blazing blue from his red burned face, the general also was arrived and eager.

“Prepare to fight on foot!” shouted Captain Moylan.

The Sioux were many; the soldiers few; but with the horses protected by a semi-circle of skirmishers they steadily fell back to the grove of the noonday nap. Yet even here matters might have gone hard—for these Sioux were determined fighters—had not appeared, coming on with cheers and guidons flying,

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four more companies of the Seventh, sent ahead by the wise General Stanley. And the Sioux galloped away.

The companies brought bad news. That morning, after the general had left, along the line of march had been found the lifeless bodies of Dr. Honzinger and Mr. Baliran, pierced by ball and by arrow. The two cronies had wandered, as customary, and must have been two miles from help when Indians—Sioux, of course—had struck them down.

Two soldiers also were killed, and another battle was fought—a longer, harder battle—with more Sioux, up the Yellowstone, before, the last week in September, the Seventh returned again to barracks.

These were new barracks, the post of Fort Abraham Lincoln, built this summer and fall beside the Missouri, above Fort Rice and opposite the town of Bismarck which was the end of the railroad.

Fort Abraham Lincoln belonged to the Seventh Cavalry. It was their headquarters post, housing six companies. The four other companies on Dakota duty were stationed at Fort Rice.

'Twas rather dull being a soldier at Fort Lincoln, or Rice either, in the long, snowy, below-zero winter. No trains came into Bismarck; mail and supplies must arrive by horse and sleigh. There was little mounted drill for the soldiers, and the men moved about well muffled in fur caps and buffalo-hide shoes and mittens.

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Out near the agencies the friendly Sioux gathered, waiting till spring; and further in the reservation had gathered in their villages the unfriendly Sioux, under Sitting Bull the medicine chief. But who was friendly and who was unfriendly could not be told; so that nobody in the post was permitted to wander beyond rifle shot, except on business.

The Arikara or Ree scouts and their families were camped at the edge of Fort Lincoln. Bloody Knife the chief scout was the general's favorite. The best white scout at Fort Lincoln was "Lonesome" Charley Reynolds. He had long-lashed, dark-blue eyes, and small, fine features. He was quieter than even Will Comstock; and rarely spoke unless spoken to. He did not look like a scout or act like a scout, yet he was one of the bravest men of the West.

In the spring came out upon a visit from the East another Custer—Boston Custer, the general's youngest brother; a thin, pale stripling about the age of Ned the trumpeter. He did not look well, but he expected that the fresh air and the out-door life of the western plains would make him strong.

When the spring opened, there had been much talk about the mysterious Black Hills, which the Indians called Pah-sap-pa. The newspapers had contained a great deal of reference to the Black Hills, and now the frontier people of Wyoming, to the southwest of it, and of Dakota, to the east of it, were asking that the

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Government let explorers in. However, this was Sioux country, guaranteed to them by the United States in the treaty of 1868; and it was very dear Sioux country.

"You see," said Charley Reynolds, in one of the moments when he talked among the men, "it's like this. Now, I've never been in the Black Hills—away in, I mean. I've no doubt there's gold there. The rocks look so, to me; and trappers, and the Injuns too, say there's gold. But it's medicine country. The Injuns say those mountains are full of bad spirits who mustn't be disturbed. The fact is, it's the only good country the Sioux have. Lots of timber and fine water and grass; both a summer and a winter country; and the Sioux don't mean to give it up. You can't blame 'em. They know that as soon as the miners get in there, the game will be scared out or killed, and timber cut, and water spoiled, and the Indians driven off. They watch that region mighty close."

"You're right, I guess," agreed Sergeant Butler, and Odell also nodded. "But I'll wager my buffalo coat against a pipeful of tobacco that the Government isn't going to let those Black Hills stay unexplored. The army's got to have a map of this reservation, so that in case of trouble we know where we're going. Then if the Injuns retreat into the Black Hills, we can follow 'em."

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Sure enough, when the plains grew green with grass the report spread that the Seventh Cavalry was to explore the Black Hills, distant 200 miles southwest, in air-line.

The orders were issued June 8 from the Department of Dakota headquarters at St. Paul, by command of Brigadier-General Alfred H. Terry, the Department commander. The four companies of the Seventh from Fort Rice were to come up to Fort Lincoln, and all ten companies were to take the field together. There would be "doughboys" or "walking soldiers;" G company of the Seventeenth Infantry and I company of the Twentieth; a squad of army engineers under Captain William Ludlow; General George A. Forsyth who was the famous "Sandy" Forsyth of the island fight with Roman Nose, near the Forks of the Republican; Charley Reynolds the scout; Skunk Head and Bull Bear and other Rees under Bloody Knife; and some Santee Sioux whose chief guides were Goose and "Jo Lawrence."

Boston Custer, or "Bos," announced that he was to go; and before the start, arrived two scientists, engaged by the Government: Professor N. H. Winchell, the state geologist of Minnesota, and Mr. George Bird Grinnell, of New Haven, Connecticut, who would report upon the fossils and animals. A photographer of St. Paul arrived, to take pictures on the trip; and a number of civilian miners attached themselves to the column, to prospect for gold.

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The start was made on July 2. The expedition must return within sixty days. It made a formidable sight: about 1000 men in all, with three gatling guns and a three-inch rifled cannon, 110 army wagons and ambulances, and the forty Custer dogs!

Agard the interpreter and Charley Reynolds said the Indian scouts expected that the white people would not dare to enter right into the mysterious Black Hills. The general laughed.

The march was almost a picnic. Anybody who wished to hunt had hunting of antelope and deer in plenty. The scientists were busy, examining rocks and animals. Bos Custer was a great favorite. Of course he was a tenderfoot, for this was his first experience on the plains. The general and Colonel Tom, his brothers, played many jokes upon him, to try his mettle and make fun; but he took everything so good naturedly and made himself so useful that he was much liked. As for the general, he was again in his element: buckskin clad, galloping on Vic or Dandy, talking sign-language with Bloody Knife and Bull Bear and Skunk's Head and Goose, and picking up much information from the scientists.

After 300 miles, according to the odometer or measuring wheels of the engineers' cart, on July 20 through a little ravine the course suddenly changed from dry burning prairie to green grass knee-deep, ripening gooseberries, wild cherries, cool breezes and crystal waters. Such was the terrible Black Hills,

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on the inside. Now even the scouts were eager to go on. Never had so entrancing a country been seen by anybody in the command.

From north to south and south to north through the Black Hills marched the column. The soldiers hunted and napped, the scientists searched for knowledge, the miners prospected for gold. They found considerable "color," which they excitedly showed at camp; but they did not make any great strikes. Professor Winchell, the geologist, was of the opinion that not much gold lay hidden here; however, he did not convince the miners or the soldiers.

There was no trouble from the Sioux; the whole expedition was a perfect success, without bother; and their wagons and saddles laden high with horns and skins and other specimens, at halfpast four o'clock on the afternoon of August 30, the sixtieth day to a dot, the tattered but happy column swung their hats to Fort Abe Lincoln again.

XX

RAIN-IN-THE-FACE VOWS VENGEANCE

THE winter of 1874-1875 settled down upon Fort Lincoln, just as had settled the long, cold snowy winter of the year preceding. Now again was it buffalo shoes and mittens and fur caps; short drills, and time hanging rather heavy. The Sioux under Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse remained out somewhere in the depths of the vast reservation. They refused to come into the agencies as did the other Indians; and any supplies that they got were carried out to them by their friends. The Sioux called General Custer's trail into the Black Hills the "Thieves' Trail." They had made many protests against it. But white adventurers were much excited, and were openly planning to go there prospecting for gold. Already one party had gone out, in defiance of the Government and of the Indians, and were somewhere in the Hills. Soldiers sent after them failed to find them.

However, this was not the main excitement at Fort Lincoln. When December was drawing to a close orders were suddenly issued for Captain Yates to take three officers and one hundred men, and pro-

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ceed out upon a scout. Lieutenant Tom Custer was one of the officers; and as trumpeter of Lieutenant Tom's troop Ned was detailed for the march.

This seemed pretty tough, at holiday time; for the weather was piercing cold, with a keen wind blowing. But it was a change, anyway, from the rather dull garrison routine.

Nobody in the ranks seemed to know where the column were going, or why they were going. Charley Reynolds was guide.

Southward led the route, down along the Missouri, with the officers and troopers muffled to their noses in warmest clothing, regulation or not. Fort Rice, twenty miles, was passed; and twenty more miles lay behind ere, at a brief halt, the officers appeared to be consulting some orders that Captain Yates had opened. He and Lieutenant Tom and the other two officers murmured and nodded. At "For'rd—march!" the column of fours moved on.

Ahead, thirty miles, or seventy miles below Fort Abraham Lincoln, was the Standing Rock Agency for the Unkpapa and Yanktonais Sioux. On the third day of the march the agency buildings rose in sight. Just outside the agency grounds the column made temporary camp, to spend the night.

There were many Sioux about, for it was ration time, and from their village ten miles down-river they were gathering to get their beef and other supplies.

Now was it reported through the camp that the

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expedition had been made for the purpose of capturing some Sioux who had killed a white man on the Red River of the North, the summer before. That would seem correct; for after breakfast forty of the troopers were led off, south, to the village, where, rumor said, the murderers might be. This appeared rather a foolish piece of work by Captain Yates and Lieutenant Tom. Of course the other Sioux would see the soldiers arrive and would warn the murderers to hide.

However, "Boots and Saddles" was it, for all the camp. After the detachment had trotted away, Captain Yates took the remainder of the company to the agency. They were halted a short distance from the post store.

It was full of Indians, trading. In and out they stalked, wrapped all in buffalo robes or Government blankets of red, blue and gray. Scarcely a face was to be seen. Lieutenant Tom dismounted, and beckoning to five of his soldiers leisurely entered. He stayed inside, as if chatting with the trader.

"At ease," ordered Captain Yates, to the sergeant of the troop outside. So the remainder of the column might dismount, and stretch legs, and swing arms, and watch curiously the many shrouded Indians. Even this was poky work. Yet something was in the air. Evidently Captain Yates and Lieutenant Tom had a scheme up their sleeves.

Three hours passed—and now on a sudden arose a great commotion. From the store issued quick scuffle

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of feet, and sharp commands. High swelled angry voices, in guttural Sioux; Indians outside began to run.

“Comp’ny—’ten’shun! Mount!” shouted Captain Yates, “Right into line—march! For’r’d—march! Trot—march! Comp’ny—halt!”

In line they had drawn up before the agency door. An Indian within was loudly speaking, as if calling to arms. At least five hundred Indians came running, with their rifles; and out through the doorway was being hustled between two of the soldiers another Indian, arms bound behind him, blanket fallen from his proud, handsome, stolid face. Only his eyes flashed defiance. Two soldiers opened the way; Lieutenant Tom and the fifth soldier followed.

“Rain-in-the-Face!” aside said somebody, in the ranks; and the name traveled right and left. That was Rain-in-the-Face, a prominent Unkpapa warrior, who had been arrested by Lieutenant Tom.

“Advance—carbines!” shouted Captain Yates, above the tumult; and butts of carbines were promptly placed upon thigh, muzzles up. This was a “ready,” for quick action.

The Indian orator was still shrieking and urging; the other Indians were jostling and clamoring, and from all directions the crowd was being increased. It looked bad for the little company of cavalry.

Rain-in-the-Face made no resistance. He was hoisted upon a horse, and ringed by a guard of soldiers,

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who gave not an inch before the scowls and threats around-about.

Gradually, as through the post interpreter Captain Yates now talked to the Indians, the tumult died. They knew that in a stand-up fight on the spot many of them would be killed; and they knew that Rain-in-the-Face had been arrested for good cause. So presently away they began to rush, to their village, to pow-wow and maybe get reinforcements.

"Fours right—march! Column right—march!" ordered Captain Yates; and with Rain-in-the-Face in the middle, out from the agency moved the compact cavalry column.

When halt was made at the temporary camp just outside, speedily was it known to all why Rain-in-the-Face had been arrested. A couple of weeks before, the Sioux gathered at the agency had a great dance, during which the warriors had recited their biggest deeds. They spoke in Sioux, but Charley Reynolds the scout was sitting near, watching. He understood Sioux. When Rain-in-the-Face had entered the circle, and boasted of his career, suddenly Charley pricked his ears, but gave no sign that he heard; for Rain-in-the-Face was vaunting how, a year and a half before, he had killed two white men.

One was a fat man with no hair; him he had shot from his horse and had finished with the war-club. The other was a younger man, the fat man's com-

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panion, who had taken refuge in a clump of trees. He had signed for peace, and had offered his hat; but he also had been shot, with bullet and arrow. No scalps were taken, because the fat man had been bald and the other man had very short hair.

Then Charley Reynolds knew that he had found one of the murderers of Veterinary Surgeon Honzinger and Sutler Baliran, killed when inoffensive and unarmed, on the Yellowstone expedition of the summer of 1873. Out slipped Charley, as soon as he could, and hastened with the news to General Custer at Fort Lincoln.

General Custer had kept the news quiet, lest the Sioux should be alarmed and send word to Rain-in-the-Face. He was accounted a mighty warrior, for he had made a record by hanging four hours, in a Sun Dance ceremony, by ropes fastened to splints thrust through his chest and back. He had five well-known brothers—Bear's Face, Red Thunder, Iron Horn, Little Bear, and Shave Head: warriors all. So whatever was to be done must be done cunningly. And so it had been done.

Waiting there in the agency store, until the Indians should give glimpses of their features, when Rain-in-the-Face finally had dropped his blanket a little Lieutenant Tom, with a leap from behind, had clasped him about both arms.

At Fort Lincoln Rain-in-the-Face confessed to the murders. He evidently expected to be hanged at once,

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for he dressed himself in black. His brother Iron Horn, and other leading Sioux, tried to comfort him, and in council with the general they pleaded for him. But all actions and talk were conducted in a solemn dignified manner, as befitting the great Sioux nation.

While the general waited specific orders from the War Department, Rain-in-the-Face must be confined in the guard-house. Here he stayed for almost four months. He remained ever calm, ever proud, looking at nobody when he was permitted to walk back and forth, chained to another prisoner, for exercise.

Early in the morning of April spread an alarm, from sentry to officers. Through a hole made in the wooden wall by white prisoners Rain-in-the-Face had stolen away. He did not appear at the agency. He was not found in the nearby camps. However, soon, by mouth to mouth, Sioux to Sioux, from Sitting Bull's band of hostiles far up the Yellowstone River in Montana he sent word. Charley Reynolds himself was authority.

"Rain-in-the-Face says," reported Charley, "to tell the Long Hair and the Long Hair's brother that he will cut their hearts out because they put a great warrior in prison."

XXI

SITTING BULL SAYS: "COME ON!"

THIS summer of 1875 no regular campaign or expedition was made by the Seventh Cavalry. The few months were spent in drills at Fort Lincoln and Fort Rice, and in short scouts to reconnoitre and for practice. However, there was no telling when the whole regiment might be ordered out in a hurry. The Sioux muttered constantly; and according to Charley Reynolds and other persons who knew, around the posts, they were "going bad."

Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse were still outside the reservation, in their own country of the Powder River and the Big Horn region; but even Red Cloud and Spotted Tail, who had first signed the treaty of 1868, agreeing to the reservation of Dakota, complained stoutly of unfair treatment.

Red Cloud had claimed that the Sioux were being robbed in their supplies; some of the supplies sent out by the Government never reached them, and other supplies were unfit to use. An investigation proved that Red Cloud had spoken truth.

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The Northern Pacific Railroad had stopped at Bismarck, but the surveys on across Dakota had been made, and this also annoyed the Sioux. They had understood that no white man's road should cross the reservation without their permission. And, of course, there was the Black Hills trouble.

"Well, what do you think, these days, Charley?" invited Odell, as the summer wore on, and only rumors filled the air. "It's getting late for war, until next year; ain't it? But I hear there's a thousand miners in the Black Hills, and they've started a town they call Custer City."

"Lonesome" Charley Reynolds slowly puffed at his pipe, and gazed before with his calm, sombre dark-blue eyes.

"There'd have been war, if there'd been buffalo," he answered. "But old Red Cloud was smart enough to send out runners, to count the buffalo, and the runners reported mighty few. 'Cording to my notion, taking the plains altogether, north and south, six or eight millions buffalo have been butchered by white market hunters. The buffalo is what the Sioux and the Cheyenne live on. Red Cloud sees that with the buffalo gone the Sioux are beholden to the whites for meat; they can't carry on a war, long; and that's why instead of a fight Red Cloud and Spotted Tail are favoring selling the Black Hills to the Government. The whites have the Hills anyway. Those Custer City lots they're selling are Injun land. 'Tain't just

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and right—but it's white man's way. As long as we don't want the land the Injuns can have it; but when we want it, then we find some way of getting it."

Reports came in of a great council held September 17, at Crow Butte, near the Red Cloud agency on the north line of northwestern Nebraska. Here the United States met the Sioux nation and the Northern Cheyennes and Arapahos, to barter for the Black Hills. Part of the Indians wanted to sell, part did not. They spoke of Pah-sap-pa as their "House of Gold."

The United States offered them \$400,000 a year as long as the white men should want the Hills; and offered to buy for \$6,000,000. The Sioux laughed. They asked, some \$30,000,000, some \$60,000,000; or "support for every Indian, so long as the Sioux should live."

Said Little Wolf, Cheyenne chief:

"There has been a great deal stolen from those Hills already. If the Great Father gets this rich country from us he ought to pay us well for it. That country is worth more than all the wild beasts and all the tame beasts that the white people have."

Said Crow Feather, Sioux:

"Even if our Great Father should give a hundred different kinds of live-stock to each Indian house every year, that would not pay for the Black Hills. I was not born and raised here for fun. I hope the Great Father will look and see how many millions of dollars have been stolen from those Black Hills; and

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when he finds it out, I want him to pay us that. And we will not allow white people to be coming in by many trails. The thieves' road made by the Long Yellow Hair is enough. That we can watch."

So the United States did not buy or lease the Black Hills—the Pah-sap-pa of the Sioux and the Cheyennes. Ned heard many arguments, for and against, at the post; but he could not see that the Indians were much in the wrong.

However, the Government considered that it, also, had a grievance. Out there in the Powder River and Big Horn country, off the reservation, were Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse. The treaty said that this fine region of northeastern Wyoming and southeastern Montana from the Dakota and Nebraska lines to the Big Horn Mountains was all Indian property, to be Sioux hunting-grounds as long as there was anything to hunt. Here were ranging the free bands of Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse; but the whites of Wyoming and of Montana looked upon these rovers as dangerous, and the Crows, who were trying to live peaceably on their reservation to the west of the hunting-grounds, declared that the hunter Sioux stole their horses.

"When these Sioux change from hunting buffalo to hunting scalps or horses, if they can't find them one place they will another," complained the whites—some of whom rather coveted the Powder River country for themselves.

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"We might just as well go out and fight like we used to," complained the Crows, "instead of being good Indians, for we don't gain anything by it if other Indians are allowed to steal from us."

It was becoming a popular custom among the Sioux for their young men to slip away from the reservation limits, join the free bands, and have a good time until they decided to come into the agencies for supplies.

All in all, matters between the Sioux nation and the nation of the United States were not satisfactory. Before the middle of December it was known at Fort Lincoln that the Government had ordered Sitting Bull and the other bands to come in upon the reservation before the end of January, or to suffer the consequences.

"Huh!" grunted Odell, as the news reached Fort Lincoln, on its way to the various agencies. "That means war."

"Yes, and likely a winter campaign, too," chipped in Sergeant Butler of Ned's company. "Another Washita for the Seventh!"

"Won't Sitting Bull or Crazy Horse come in, you think?" queried Ned, anxiously.

"Charley says they won't," quoth Sergeant Butler, nodding toward the scout.

Charley was sitting in the barracks room, taking things easy, by the stove.

"No, they won't," he asserted, calmly. "Why

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should they? They're on their own grounds, guaranteed to them by the Government, where they can live and hunt. What's more, half the Sioux nation will be joining 'em. I've got a heap o' respect for Sitting Bull. He's the biggest power in the Sioux nation to-day, though he isn't a chief."

"Do you know him, Charley?" asked Ned.

"Yes, I know him. He's a short, heavy-set Injun, with a broad homely mug, and brown hair and light complexion pock-marked up. Only Injun I ever saw having brown hair. His Sioux name is Ta-tan-kah-yo-tan-kah. He's an Unkpapa, and his name as a boy was Jumping Badger, until he counted a coup on a Crow carcass and took his father's name. He's not a chief, or son of a chief except a subchief, but he's the smartest Sioux living. The war chiefs don't think much of him. His specialty is making medicine and guessing at what'll happen. He's a good guesser, too. And he sure can read human character."

"Won't he fight?"

"Oh, he's done some fighting, Injun fashion. Up at Buford (Fort Buford) they've got an old roster of the Thirty-first Infantry, that belonged to Sitting Bull and that another Injun stole from him. He'd pictured it full of himself and his killings and stealings. So he's been a warrior; but among the other Injuns he ranks as big medicine and not as a man like Crazy Horse or Gall or Red Cloud; except that he hates the whites and always will, I reckon."

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"Do you know Crazy Horse, too, Charley?"

"Yes, I know Crazy Horse. He's an Oglala Sioux, but his band are mostly northern Cheyennes. Crazy Horse is a fighter, all right. You can bet on that. Chief Gall is their general, though. Next to him is Crow King. If we have a fight, it will be Gall and Crow King and Crazy Horse doing the planning, and Sitting Bull doing the prophesying, urging 'em on."

"We can beat them, anyhow." This was the confident voice of Boston Custer. "Bos" had been appointed forage-master, so now he counted himself a member of the regiment, and was proud of the fact. He liked to mix with the soldiers, sometimes, and be one of them, even if his brother was the commanding officer.

"Maybe so, maybe not," mused Charley Reynolds, soberly. "That Bad Lands country is a terror to cross. Those Injuns are better armed than the soldiers, too; with Springfields and Winchesters and Remingtons that they're getting direct from the agencies—along with plenty supplies. When you run up against those Sioux, son, you'll know you've been in a scrimmage."

The weeks passed. By the first of February the Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse bands had not come in upon the reservation, and evidently they did not intend to come in. One day appeared at Fort Lincoln old Isaiah, a negro interpreter who had married a Sioux wife and lived at the Standing Rock agency.

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" Well, Isaiah, where are the rest of your Injuns? " hailed a soldier.

" Who you mean? " demanded Isaiah.

" Sitting Bull."

" Didn't you get his word? " retorted Isaiah. " He say to the soldiers: ' Come on. Needn't bring any guides. You can find me easy. I won't run away.' That is so, because my squaw tell me, an' she know."

XXII

OUT AGAINST THE SIOUX

THE general and Mrs. Custer had been away all winter up to this time, sight-seeing in New York. Now they returned by a hard trip through a blizzard—and they returned just in time. Orders had been sent out by General Sheridan, commander of the Division of the West, to General Terry, commanding the Department of Dakota, that the Department must bring the disobedient Sioux to task. Of course, the Seventh Cavalry would take the van, and the Long Hair would lead his warriors.

Reports said that the march was to begin at once; that General Sheridan was anxious for another campaign. And it looked that way, with General Custer bustling about at Fort Lincoln, and with supplies and troops (according to talks among the officers) being collected at St. Paul in readiness for the first trains through to Bismarck.

“Aw, just put the Seventh in the field. That’s enough. We can lick the Sioux and make ’em eat at the Government’s table,” was the slogan in Fort Lincoln.

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The plans seemed to be that the Department of Dakota was to attack from the east and the west, and the Department of the Platte from the south. Thus it would be pretty hard for the Indians to escape, except by going north into Canada.

The spring was late. The winter kept coming back again, to snow a little more; and after the snows there were many freezes and cold rains. The general would have started out at any time; but General Terry, at St. Paul, was not ready. He would accompany the column from Fort Lincoln, although General Custer was to command in the field.

Meanwhile the general was letting his hair grow long again, after having had it cut short for his stay in the East, and was preparing his command. There were many drills. Everybody was eager to be gone. Some of the officers, like Captain Benteen and Lieutenant Calhoun and Captain (he had been promoted) Tom Custer and Lieutenant Smith and "Queen's Own" Cook and "Bandbox" Yates had fought Indians before; others like the new major, Major Marcus Reno, and Lieutenant Reily and Lieutenant Sturgis, were rather green at the business; and so it was with the enlisted men.

As for Ned, he had been transferred to Captain Benteen's company, which was Troop H. Captain Tom now commanded Troop C.

Word went out that the regiment would take the field in April, sure, if the snow ever quit. Then,

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amidst the preparations, suddenly General Custer was summoned to Washington. All knew that he hated to go; yet go he evidently must. He had been summoned to testify before a committee appointed by Congress to look into some alleged frauds at the Indian trading-posts. Of course, it was expected that he would come back soon; for who else was there to out-fight the warriors of the great Sioux nation?

March passed. Already the army further west, in Wyoming where the snows were not so deep, had fought one battle with the Sioux. On March 17, or Saint Patrick's Day, the Second and the Third Cavalry out of Fort Fetterman, under General J. J. Reynolds, sent by General Crook the "Gray Fox," had attacked Crazy Horse's village at the mouth of the Little Powder River and had destroyed it.

But the Indians had escaped, and had recovered their pony herd, too; so that in the opinion of the Seventh, the job could not compare with the fine job done down on the Washita. However, it was tough luck to be on waiting orders here at Lincoln, while the Second and the Third were busy at work.

No matter, though. Thirty-below-zero weather turned the Fetterman troops home again. Crazy Horse, now crazier than ever, would join Sitting Bull; and there would be fighting enough for everybody.

April arrived, and grew, and still no General Custer appeared. It was rumored that he had been held in

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Washington, because of his testimony that did not please President Grant; next it was rumored that he had been removed from command of the "Custer" column; and next it was rumored that he would not accompany the regiment at all! This was startling news to the Seventh. What would be a campaign without "Old Curly!"

Now in these the days of chill April every soldier was on tiptoes with impatience. Custer or no Custer, the time was ripe for the march. Soon the grass would be greening, the Sioux would be able to travel, and the advantage would be all with them. Meanwhile, every report from the agencies was more alarming. The "friendlies" or "reservation Indians" were slipping, slipping, away, away, taking supplies and guns.

"Down at Standing Rock I hear there's only five thousand Injuns where there used to be seven thousand," asserted Odell. "The rest have lit out, to 'visit' and to 'hunt'; but you can depend on 't, 'tis to the Big Horn country they're goin'."

The four troops of the Seventh from Fort Rice and the six from Fort Lincoln were moved out of barracks into camp, as a more convenient place for rendezvous. The infantry allies arrived, with a battery of gatlings; so did supplies, on the first trains. Bismarck City was alive with the excitement of the preparations.

Bloody Knife the Arikara chief scout could not understand what had happened to the Long Hair. Ned

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watched him talking rapid sign language with Charley Reynolds; and afterward stalking away gloomy.

“Bloody Knife asks why the Long Hair doesn’t come and lead his warriors out. Too much fuss and wait, he says. The Sioux laugh and brag; and send in word from the hills: ‘Are the white soldiers tired before they start?’ ‘What is the matter with the Long Hair?’ ‘Is the Long Hair sick?’ And so forth. I tell Bloody Knife we have another big chief, named Terry, to lead us; but he says: ‘No want Terry. Want Long Hair. Long Hair never tired, never afraid, heap chief.’”

“Terry’s the man who captured Fort Fisher in Sixty-five, isn’t he?” queried an infantry soldier, standing near. “He must be a good one, then.”

“Yes; that’s how he got his general’s star in the Regular Army, and thanks o’ Congress besides,” answered Odell. “And wasn’t our own Lieutenant Smith there, too, on Terry’s staff? Sure, he was carryin’ the colors, to cheer on a regiment, when a ball so smashed his shoulder that he never can lift his arm above a level. Terry’s all right. He was a good lawyer before he was a good soldier. Everybody likes him. But he’s never fought Injuns. We all want Custer and you can be sure Sheridan does, too. It’s the president, who be head o’ the Army, that’s ag’in him. He’s talked too freely, I reckon, an’ some o’ Grant’s friends have been hurt by it.”

However, the first week in May, who should arrive

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but General Custer! Afterwards it was known that he had just escaped being left behind entirely. Finally he had begged to be allowed to go upon the expedition whether he commanded or not. "I appeal to you as a soldier to spare me the humiliation of seeing my regiment march to meet the enemy and I not to share its dangers," had been his telegram to President Grant.

General Terry had joined in the appeal, and now President Grant had consented. General Custer was to command only his regiment; General Terry was to command the whole column; but, anyway, "Old Curly" would be on hand.

He looked thin and haggard, as if he had worried much. His hair was short, and it could not grow out again before the march. Time pressed. Here it was May, spring had opened, the Indians were afield, every day added to their strength.

The officers' families and the families of many of the enlisted men moved from the post into the camp. Another Custer also turned up. This was young Armstrong Reed, or "Autie," the general's nephew. His mother was the general's eldest sister. "Autie" was younger than "Bos" and Ned. With a school friend he had come out from the East, to spend his vacation being either scout or soldier, he wasn't certain which. He and "Bos" were wild to go upon the expedition; many of the soldiers also were eager, and did a little bragging; but the women of the officers' circle and of Suds Row, they were very sober. They knew that the

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Sioux were gathering, what the delay had done to change the advantage, and how serious the campaign might be. Mrs. Custer's eyes seemed to be brimming; and so did Mrs. Calhoun's, and Mrs. Yates', and all.

Not until the middle of May were orders issued to break camp. First General Terry and staff arrived from department headquarters at St. Paul. General Alfred Howe Terry, commander of the Department of Dakota, was a tall, soldierly man, with long beard and calm, courteous way. Ned immediately liked his looks.

May 17 was the day for the start. The "General" or call to strike tents was sounded at five o'clock in the morning. The wagon train was sent ahead, escorted by the infantry; but General Terry had directed General Custer to march the Seventh around the parade ground at Fort Lincoln, as a compliment to the "wives and sweethearts" there.

This was kind in General Terry. He had seen how the women were feeling, and he hoped to cheer them up.

Proudly straight sat officers and men, as platoon by platoon, in flashing column of yellow and blue, headed by the band the celebrated Seventh Regiment—"Custer's Regiment"—of United States Cavalry, rode around and around the Fort Abraham Lincoln parade-ground. The band played "Garryowen":

Our hearts so stout have got us fame,
For soon 'tis known from whence we came;
Where'er we go they dread the name
Of Garryowen in glory!

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Voices cheered; children pranced. But from Officers' Row and from Suds Row peered tear-stained faces vainly trying to smile, and from the Arikara village outside welled the mournful chants of doleful squaws.

Nevertheless Ned, riding in line with Captain Benteen's platoons, trumpet on thigh, revolver at hip, could not but feel sure that such a grand regiment was able to thrash all the Indians of the plains.

The tune by the band changed to "The Girl I Left Behind Me":

The hope of final victory
Within my bosom burning,
Is mingled with sweet thoughts of thee
And of my fond returning.
But should I ne'er return again,
Still worth thy love thou'lt find me;
Dishonor's breath shall never stain
The name I'll leave behind me.

This was sign that the parade was over. Out from the garrison quarters marched the column of platoons; and here was delivered the command to halt, and to dismount.

"Officers and men are permitted to leave the ranks for the purpose of taking farewells of their families. They will rejoin their commands at the sound of 'Assembly.'"

These were the instructions. However, the general stayed with the column, and so did Captain Calhoun. Their wives were to ride with them, a way, as usual.

Some of the officers and men were suspiciously red-

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eyed when at "Assembly" they again fell into place. The wagon train could be seen, rolling on, following the plodding infantry. The cavalry moved fast, to pass and take the advance. Mrs. Custer and Mrs. Calhoun rode with the general at the head of the column. He was mounted on Vic. The stag hounds trotted on either flank. They were always included.

Truly, seeing this long column stretching two miles, ranks regular, spurs jingling, infantry guns aslant, guidon and flag gaily afloat, there appeared to be no reason why the white "wives and sweethearts" and those Ree squaws should feel so bad. Here were the twelve troops of the fighting Seventh Cavalry, under Custer himself; here were infantry—two companies of the Sixth Regulars and one of the Seventeenth; here were four gatling guns and a platoon of the Twentieth Infantry to serve them; and forty Arikari or Ree scouts under Chief Bloody Knife; and forage Master "Bos" Custer and young "Autie" Reed, who was appointed a herder for the beef cattle, and "Lonesome" Charley Reynolds the white scout, and Isaiah the squaw-man black scout from Fort Rice; and a great supply train of 114 six-mule wagons, 107 other wagons, and eighty-five pack-mules; altogether, 1,000 men. They had rations and forage for thirty days, and each soldier carried one hundred rifle or carbine cartridges, and fifty revolver cartridges. The Seventh had left their sabres behind and they were glad of it, because the sabres were a bother. They

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could do better work with their Colt's revolvers and their Remington carbines. Not even the officers wore swords.

This was the "Lincoln column." Up from Wyoming were marching the Crook column—ten companies of the Third Cavalry, and five of the Second, and six companies from the Fourth and the Ninth United States Infantry: 1300 men under General George Crook, the "Gray Fox" who had fought the Apaches in Arizona. In from western Montana were marching the "Montana column"—four companies of the Second Cavalry, and two of the Seventh Infantry: 400 men under General John Gibbon, who had won rank and honor in the Civil War. Twenty-seven hundred soldiers under three famous generals ought to whip Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse.

The Lincoln column made first camp a short distance out from the fort. Early the next morning Mrs. Custer and Mrs. Calhoun said good-by to their husbands and friends and must go back to Lincoln.

As long as they were in sight they waved their handkerchiefs; the general and Lieutenant Calhoun from their positions waved back. When this ceased, then did it seem to Ned as though at last the campaign into the enemy's country had actually begun.

XXIII

LOOKING FOR SITTING BULL

“How many Injuns will there be, do you think?” invited “Autie” Reed, excitedly, of Ned.

This was the evening of June 21. The expedition had been out from Fort Lincoln over a month. Now they were in camp at the mouth of the Rosebud River, on the south side of the Yellowstone River in southeastern Montana—just beyond the Tongue River where in the summer of 1873 General Custer had first met the Sioux in battle and had almost been cut off, and Doctor Honzinger and Sutler Baliran had been killed by Rain-in-the-Face.

No Indians had been met. Many of the officers and men were of the opinion that none would be found, and that all would escape. But when here the searchers were, at last, right in the enemy's home, it looked as though a fight was likely to occur soon. General Gibbon's “Montana column” was encamped across the Yellowstone. They had marched from the west down the north bank, and had reported that no Sioux had traveled north, but that they had seen hostile Indians watching them from the south bank. There-

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fore in the opinion of General Gibbon the Sioux were still south of the Yellowstone, in the wild hunting-grounds of the Big Horn and the Powder Rivers.

General Crook the Gray Fox was down there, with his soldiers. He had not been heard from, but it was expected that as he approached he would be driving the Sioux before him. Nobody knew that on June 17 General Crook had been met on the upper Rosebud by Sitting Bull's warriors and had been forced back. The red general had out-matched the white general. The Sioux were better warriors than the Apaches.

Major Reno had been ordered by General Terry to take his portion of the Seventh and scout southward, to examine the country for Indian signs and perhaps to sight General Crook. He had not sighted General Crook, who was a hundred miles distant, shut off by a wide stretch of rough, perilous country. But swinging in a circle back he had come, with news that on the Rosebud River he had struck a large trail, trending up-river, made by many Sioux. This was news indeed, and welcome news.

Steamboats ran on the Yellowstone. The Government supply boat *Far West*, Captain Grant Marsh, had arrived from the Missouri. General Terry and General Gibbon and General Custer had consulted, aboard her where she was tied to the shore unloading her supplies; and the results were known.

The "Montana column" were to be crossed to the south bank; and they, and the infantry, under General

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Terry and General Gibbon, were to proceed south up the Big Horn River, which was the next river beyond the Rosebud. The Far West was to accompany as far as it could. But the whole Seventh Cavalry were to march up the Rosebud, to the Indian trail, and see where the trail went to. Then, if the Indians tried to escape by the east or the southeast, the Seventh would turn them; and if they tried to escape north down the Big Horn, the other column would turn them.

Every soldier was now much interested, but none more interested than "Autie." So he had sought out Ned the veteran, to confer with him. "Autie," being the general's nephew, always was chock-full of inside information that he picked up among the officers. So together they made a good team.

"How many Injuns will there be, do you think?" asked "Autie," by the camp-fire.

"Major Reno says he counted sign of three hundred and eighty lodges, didn't he?" answered Ned. "Charley Reynolds says that means about fourteen hundred in all; four or five hundred warriors, if we include the boys. Indian boys over fourteen can fight as hard as the men. They did down on the Washita."

"Bloody Knife and the Rees are scared already," declared "Autie." "They're making medicine. But Half-Yellow-Face and Curly and the other Crows aren't scared. (Some Crow Indians had joined the Arikari scouts, to fight against the enemy Sioux.)

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I like them the best, anyway. They're as jolly as any of us."

"Yes," agreed Ned, wisely; "they're about the best Indians I've ever seen."

"Sioux can whip 'em," grunted a voice. It was that of Isaiah, the black squaw-man scout. "Sioux best fighters on plains."

"They can't whip us, though," retorted "Autie." "Is that Sitting Bull's trail we're going to follow, Ike?"

"No, guess not. Band goin' to Settin' Bull's village, mebbe. But don't you worry, boy. We find Settin' Bull, plenty quick; or he find us. Crazy Hoss, too. Gall, Lame Deer, Black Moon, Two Moon, He Dog, Hump, Big Road, Crow King—they all be there, with their Minniconjous, an' Oglalas, an' Cheyennes, an' Sans Arc, an' Brules, an' Hunkpapas, an' Blackfeet, jest sp'ilin' for a fight if we only fetch it to 'em in the right place."

"And Rain-in-the-Face," suggested "Autie."

"Yep; Rain-in-the-Face. He be there."

"We don't care," scoffed "Autie," true to the Seventh. "General Terry offered Uncle Autie the gatling guns and some of the Second Cavalry; but Uncle Autie says the Seventh is enough. We don't need anybody to help us; do we, Ned!"

"No," asserted Ned. "We can take care of all the Sioux that come. There aren't more than three

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thousand of them off the reservation, according to the Indian Department report; and only six or eight hundred of these are warriors. The Seventh Cavalry can whip *them*."

"You see," grunted Isaiah. "There as many Sioux off reservation as on. My squaw Sioux. She know."

"We don't care," again scoffed "Autie."

When the Seventh started, the next noon, they started in style. They passed in review before General Terry and General Gibbon and General Custer. The general, and Captain Tom and Adjutant Cook and Captain Keogh wore their buckskin suits; all the regiment were natty and businesslike; the band played "Garry-owen"—but they were to be left behind, this time, were the band. General Terry smiled and saluted each troop as in platoons they swung past. On prancing Dandy the general sat straight and proud, for this was his crack regiment.

That evening "Autie" reported upon the officers' council which was held at the general's tent. "Uncle 'Autie" had said that the regiment were to follow the Sioux even if the trail led clear to the Nebraska agencies; and it must be done on the fifteen days' rations. That sounded exactly like the general. Just as General Sheridan had once declared, when he wanted a thing done quickly he sent Custer.

The Rosebud was a small but rapid stream, flowing north through a bluffy, bare country. The Indian

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trail was struck the next day. There were lodge-pole marks and pony tracks, and little brush wicki-ups that looked as if dogs had slept under them. The Ree and Crow scouts, and Charley Reynolds and Isaiah and other scouts not Indians, rode in the advance, closely examining all the signs. They thought that the trail was about ten days old.

Over to the right was the Big Horn River, running northeast parallel with the Rosebud. But between was the Little Big Horn, which flowing northwest emptied into the Big Horn. The theory was, that the Sitting Bull or Crazy Horse village, or both, were in on the Little Horn or the Big Horn. The Seventh was to swing in a curve and meet the infantry and the Gibbon column about where the Little Horn joined the Big Horn.

That Indians were over there somewhere seemed certain; for to-day, Saturday, June 24, Curly the Crow scout reported through Mitch Bouyer the interpreter that they had found fresh Indian tracks; and they saw signal smokes on the west, or the right. The main trail was very broad and beaten to dust by the hoofs of many, many ponies.

"Ike says the dust we're making will be seen by the Sioux, sure," complained "Autie," much concerned, at noon camp finding Ned. "The Little Big Horn is called by the Sioux 'Greasy Grass River.' It's just beyond those hills. They're the Wolf Mountains. The

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Injuns might be on top, spying down on us. Maybe we won't catch 'em."

However, General Custer knew as much as Isaiah. The companies were ordered to march at wider intervals, so as to make as little dust as possible; and that night the camp was pitched under a flanking bluff, and fires were extinguished as soon as supper had been cooked. The trail had turned off from the valley of the Rosebud. It headed for the west, as if to cross over to the Little Big Horn. The first sergeants spread the word among the companies for the men to be ready to march again at eleven-thirty. After taps there seemed to be another officers' council, by candle-light at headquarters. Lying in his blanket, amidst the dark, while officers on their way to the general's stepped over him, Ned could tell that something was up. The air was full of mystery and expectation.

As young "Autie" was sound asleep in his own blanket, Ned, like other men in the ranks, did not know precisely what the officers had talked about. But at 11.30 the silent reveille—which was touch of hand and low word by the sergeants and corporals—was "sounded," and by column of fours the regiment rode out through the dusty dusk; the train of pack mules followed.

It was slow going. Long after midnight the command to halt was passed down the column; and presently was it known that the scouts claimed they could

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not guide them any further across the divide until daylight.

Everybody waited. Daylight was near. In about an hour the east began to brighten; in another hour there was light enough for making coffee. Carrying a message, from Captain Benteen, Ned had another glimpse of "Autie," who was going back to the horse herd.

"Hello," hailed "Autie." "You ought to have been there! Uncle Autie and the Injun scouts have been talking, and Bloody Knife said to the others: 'We'll find enough Sioux to keep us all fighting two or three days.' And Uncle Autie just smiled and said: 'Oh, I guess we'll get through with them in one day!' Those Rees are awful scared. It's going to be a big battle, I bet. I wonder if we'll fight on Sunday. I've got to tend to my horses. Good-by."

The sun was well up. It was a glorious June day; and it was the 25th, or Sunday, as "Autie" had remarked. Pretty soon, while the troops were still waiting and resting and wondering, the general came riding down the column. He was bareback, on Vic. His face was aglow, under his broad-brimmed hat, his yellow hair and tawny moustache shone, but his blue eyes were weary and puckered, with a trace of worry.

"We march at eight o'clock, Benteen," he directed, to the captain. "The scouts have spied the location of the Indian camp about fifteen miles ahead, over on the Little Horn. A lot of smoke and 'heap ponies.'

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Varnum reports they passed some bodies, on Sioux scaffolding. Let me have Fletcher as my orderly."

"All right, sir," responded Captain Benteen; and the general trotted on. At a nod from the captain, Ned made haste to mount and follow.

"Probably we approach as close as we can, to reconnoiter; and early in the morning we'll attack," was remarking to the captain Lieutenant Gibson, as Ned sped away.

"There can't be more than twelve or fifteen hundred. We can trim that number easy," was the answer.

Who was there to tell that over the ridge, well concealed in the crooked valley of the Little Big Horn, lay in one great village—another village like the village on the Washita, only larger—the allied bands of the Oglalas, the Minneconjous, the Sans Arc or Bowless, the Brules or Burnt Thighs, the Hunkpapas, the Blackfeet, the Northern Cheyennes: 15,000 Indians, with at least 3000 of them fighters well-armed and commanded by wise Gall and other mighty chiefs. The flower of the Sioux nation, they feared no white soldiers. They asked only to be let alone.

Ned now riding with the general, the march was along a little pass through the hills of the divide. About the middle of the morning halt was again ordered, in a ravine.

But taking Adjutant Cook and his orderlies and Bloody Knife the general galloped ahead to join the

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scouts on a ridge before. Ned and Sergeant Butler of Captain Tom's troop (he was the other orderly) must hold the horses while the general and the adjutant stole forward afoot, to survey over the ridge.

"Smoke," commented Sergeant Butler, nodding.

Beyond the ridge hung a film of smoke, mingled with dust. When the officers returned, by their talk they had sighted through their glasses a pony herd also. The Indian village must be down there.

In the ravine again it was hot; the brush quivered in the heat reflected by the rocks. The column were waiting, expectant. The Rees were in a group, stripped as for a fight. Their medicine-man, Bob-tail Bull, was passing from one to another, smearing them with an oil, to make them safe against the weapons of the enemy. The Crows were squatting, witnessing.

Captain Tom came galloping to meet the general.

"Keogh reports that the detail sent back by Yates to get thehardtack he dropped ran into a Sioux, opening one of the boxes with his hatchet. The fellow made off, till out of range; then he rode leisurely along the ridge, sizing us up."

"Sound officers' call," bade the general, to Ned.

The officers gathered.

"Gentlemen," said the general, "Indians have been seen on the back trail and on the hills, and our presence must be well known. This will necessitate our attacking at once, instead of waiting until the early morning, as I had intended. If we wait, the

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village will scatter and get away. Each troop commander will detail a non-commissioned officer and six men to accompany the packs. The troops will be inspected for action. The column will form in the order in which final reports are made, and the first troop reported ready will be given the post of honor, in the advance."

Captain French, M Troop, won the honor; and speedily all the troops were reported "Ready, sir."

"Prepare to mount—mount! For-r'd—march!" To fight the Sioux, onward rode the eager Seventh. "Autie" had hastened forward. Ned was the general's orderly, just as he had been at the battle of the Washita. What luck!

The divide had been crossed, for now the trail seemed to be more down hill. The Rosebud was behind; the Little Big Horn before; but the hills still enclosed on all sides. Another halt was made, and the column reformed into three battalions. So the attack would be launched in several blows—also just as at the Washita. This was the general's favorite mode of fighting. He had used it in the Civil War, too.

Major Reno had the first battalion, of three companies and the scouts; the general had five companies; Captain Benteen had three, and B Company under Captain McDougall escorted the pack-train and the loose horses. The general kept Vic for his battle-horse; Dandy was put with the extras.

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Captain Benteen's battalion swung off to the left, on a circuit down another valley. Major Reno's column also veered to the left more. The general drew even with him, across on the right side of the first valley.

As the two columns pushed ahead, Ned's heart beat as it always beat before a fight. He was seeing Indians, in the rocks and the brush—but they vanished when he looked hard. He was not afraid; no, not afraid. General Custer himself commanded, and the very best officers of the regiment were here: gallant Captain Tom, and brave Captain Keogh of two great wars, and Captain Yates the dandy, and Lieutenant Smith with crippled arm, and Lieutenant Calhoun who had married Maggie Custer, and Lieutenant "Queen's Own" Cook the adjutant. They all had been at the battle of the Washita. And here were Captain Lord the surgeon and little "Autie" and good old "Bos" and the civilian Mr. Kellogg, who wrote for the New York Herald. Isaiah the black squaw-man and "Lonesome" Charley Reynolds were over there with Major Reno.

But where were the Sioux? How long before the Little Big Horn would be reached, where stood the village?

The Ree and the Crow scouts were spread out, across the valley. He could see Bloody Knife, and Bob-tail Bull and Stab and Half-Yellow-Face and

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Curly the Crow who spoke English. Now they all had gathered in a group, and had made a smoke. Yes—there were some Sioux! The scouts had left the smoke and were chasing other riders; just a few. When the troops reached the place of the smoke they found it to be from a tipi with a dead Sioux inside. The scouts had set fire to the tipi, and had chased Sioux warriors out of the place which seemed to have been a small village camp.

“Oh, Cook,” called the general; and Adjutant Cook trotted to him. “Tell Reno the Indians are running away. The village must be only about two miles off yonder. Tell him to move on at as rapid a gait as he thinks prudent, and when he strikes the village to charge; and the whole outfit will support him.”

Adjutant Cook galloped across to Major Reno. Major Reno turned in his saddle to give the order; his column broke into a fast trot; and amidst a cloud of dust away they went, forging ahead, veering to the left as they followed the trail down beside a little stream, and around the point of a high ridge. The Little Big Horn was close before, at the end of the valley!

But the general led his column away from the trail, more to the right. Everybody listened, while peering; listened for the cheers and the volleys of the major or of Captain Benteen.

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"Steady, men," warned Captain Keogh, on his horse Comanche, to his company, behind Ned's position.

They were climbing the hither flank of the ridge around which Major Reno now had disappeared. The moments seemed hours. With thud of rapid hoof came galloping from the rear a trooper; he was a corporal, Major Reno's orderly. By the general's side he pulled short to his horse's haunches and saluted.

"The Major's compliments, sir, and says he is at the river and has everything in front of him and they are strong."

"Very well, sir," answered the general. His voice was brusque, tense with energy. "Adjutant, you'd better send somebody back with orders for that pack-train and ammunition to hurry along."

And Adjutant Cook sent a sergeant from the non-commissioned staff. Ned had forgotten his name. Away he dashed.

They continued to climb, diagonaling the slope. At any moment they would hear the shouts and shots of the Reno men, the whoops and shots of the Sioux.

"We're going to have a big fight, I guess," again ventured "Autie," dropping back a few paces to ride with Ned. His voice was tremulous, his brown face was paled, but his eyes were snapping. Ned gravely nodded.

The general had spurred impatiently; and in a little squad making for a high knoll ahead, they gradually

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left the column. The general first reached the top of the knoll. He had been craning anxiously, searching for the view beyond. Now he hauled short on Vic, as if surprised. Adjutant Cook immediately joined him. They intently peered. So did "Autie." Ned pressed forward, to see. On the left, before and below, lay the valley of the Greasy Grass and the Sioux village.

An irregular line of green willows and cottonwoods marked the course of a very crooked stream flowing evidently between high banks, amidst rolling bluffs. High, dark mountains rose far southward, shutting in a level plateau. But of these Ned took only a glimpse, for something of more importance was closer at hand.

The valley of the crooked stream was a mile and a half away, yet, partially concealed by another and lower ridge. But over the ridge was floating brown dust, from some commotion; and yonder along the stream was floating more dust. The white lodges of the Sioux gleamed through it, as they clustered for a mile and more of length! A tremendous village, this! Ant-like figures were moving hither-thither; the pony herds (which made the dust) were grazing on the plateau beyond the tipis; shrill cries of squaws, and the barking of dogs, wafted faintly through the still, sunny air. Ned looked to see Major Reno's column, but they were not yet visible.

"A big one!" exclaimed the general, his face glowing. "Good! Send another order back to Ben-



" HERE, TAKE THAT TO CAPTAIN BENTEN, AND DON'T SPARE
YOUR HORSE "

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teen, Cook. We must have those packs with their ammunition at once, and more men."

Lieutenant Cook jerked out his field note-book, and with his pencil stub hastily scrawled, resting the book upon his buckskin knee. As he wrote, digging hard in his earnestness, he read:

"Benteen, come on. Big village. Be quick. Bring packs."

He glanced over it, once, and added another word or two. He thrust the folded paper at Ned.

"Here," he said, crisply. "Take that to Captain Benteen, and don't spare your horse."

XXIV

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SALUTING, around wheeled Ned. He had one glimpse of the general's face. The blue eyes were blazing, the broad-brimmed hat was being swung to the column urging forward at a trot.

"We've caught 'em asleep, boys!" cheered the general's high, clear voice. "Now for a charge!"

Down along the column Ned went thundering, for the back trail. Familiar faces, dusty and sweaty, but resolute all, grinned at him; a hand or two waved. From the murk at the rear of the eager ranks he looked behind him. The column had topped the ridge. Headed by the general and the adjutant and young "Autie," the stars and stripes and the headquarters or "general's own" flag close following, with the cavalry guidons of red and white streaming in the sun to mark each troop, horses at hard trot, men leaning forward, hat-brims flaring, bridle-hands forward, carbines and pistols not yet drawn, rank by rank, guidon by guidon they dipped over, into a hollow, and disappeared. They were gone; but they left a cheer behind.

Ned did not look again. He had his duty to per-

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form. He was not certain as to where he would find Major Benteen; but it would be somewhere toward the river; the branching of the trails would guide.

"Go on! Go on!" he urged, into the pricked ears of his horse, another "Buckie."

"Thud-ity thud! Thud-ity thud! Thud-ity thud!" The brush and the rocks reeled dizzily past, the brown trail of many hoofs flowed under. He extracted the message from his blouse, to read it and to be sure of it in case it was lost. Yes, that was it in Adjutant Cook's hasty scrawl:

Benteen, come on. Big
Village. Be quick.
Bring packs.

Cook, adj't.

P. S. Bring packs.

"Cl'k!" clucked Ned to Buckie; and pricked him again with the spurs. They must make it. The general would be depending upon them. Adjutant Cook had repeated the words "Bring packs," which showed how important was the matter.

"Thud-ity thud! Thud-ity thud! Thud-ity thud!" The lather was white where the bridle reins rubbed Buckie's wet neck; his breath whistled, occasionally he snorted to blow from his straining nostrils the dust and moisture; but he never faltered. Good horse!

Far and faint from the right were heard a spattering of rifle-shots, like a skirmish fire; and then cheers!

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That must be Major Reno, or Captain Benteen; and off there would lie the river.

Gallop, gallop, up the back trail, with the rounded slopes, sagey and hot, girding the long, long way. Where was Captain Benteen? Where was the pack-train? Ah, here came somebody—a rider also galloping hard. Out whipped Ned's revolver; but soon the speck resolved into a man in white-man's garb. Looked like a soldier. It was "Bos!" "Bos" Custer, forage-master.

He saw Ned, and waved. Ned drew rein barely for a moment, as they met.

"Where you been?"

"Back to get a fresh horse."

"Where's Captain Benteen? Seen him?"

"Just left him. Straight on. Keep the trail. A fight, isn't it?"

"You bet." And Ned was away, in the one direction; "Bos" galloped on to join his big brother. Five of the Custer family were to be together in that battle: three brothers, a brother-in-law, and a nephew.

Ned kept watch ahead for any token of the Benteen column. Hurrah! There they were—a long mass of dusty blue, moving at a trot, down the trail, Captain Benteen and his aide leading. The pack-train was not in sight. On galloped Ned (revolver stowed again in holster), and met Captain Benteen, who had been watching his approach.

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"A dispatch from headquarters, sir," panted Ned, holding it out.

As he rode, Captain Benteen rapidly read it. Ned held himself prepared at a word to whirl and carry the order on to the packs. But as the captain read, the spattering of shots in the distance before suddenly swelled to a continuous clamor. The captain raised his head, listening, gazing. Louder, and louder, rang the gun-fire, as if the battle was approaching. The Indians were being driven this way? What——? But the captain's order rang smartly.

"B'tall-yun, draw—pistols! Gallop—march!"

With a cheer they lunged ahead, pistols held high, eyes alert, ready to meet the fleeing Sioux and turn them back again.

The valley widened; in this direction had ridden the Major Reno battalion, recalled Ned, as he, too, galloped, pistol high.

"Right and left into line—march!" shouted Captain Benteen, to cover the ground with battle front.

Then, as all were galloping, forming the line, the draw opened upon a wide cross valley, and there was the battle field—a brushy, broken arena, cut by the willow-bordered crooked stream, hazy with smoke of burning grass and powder through which echoed shot and shout and chant, and through which dimly could be seen horsemen careering in all directions, as if attacking a common object in their midst. Upon

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a bluff to the right was another battle—soldiers above, Indians below.

The gallop quickly ceased. Now where to go, or what to do, first?

“Look out! Here come some!”

The cry and the murmur swept from man to man. A confused mass was rapidly bearing up the valley, toward them.

“No, that’s all right. They’ve signaled. They’re Crows, with a pony herd.”

So they were. As they wildly scampered past, driving off their spoils, Indian-fashion, voices hailed them, inquiring where was Reno, where was Custer. One of the Crows waved his hand at the bluff.

“Soldiers there,” he said.

“Right oblique, trot—march!” ordered Captain Benteen. And for the bluff they made.

The men upon the bluff proved to be Major Reno and his battalion. They were dismounted, and were firing at long range down the slopes. The fighting below had been by the rear guard, in the retreat to the bluff. Major Reno wore a handkerchief tied about his head. Ned thought that he had been wounded, but he had only lost his hat. He had lost his revolver, too. He greeted Major Benteen feverishly.

“Where’s Custer? Have you seen Custer?”

“No.”

“Neither have I. He promised to support me. It

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was too hot in there for us. We were driven out. Five to one." The major appeared almost beside himself. "Why, I tell you we're fighting all the Sioux nation, and all the outlaws and half-breeds east of the Rocky Mountains. Dismount your men, captain, and deploy them as skirmishers along that hill on the south."

Yes, Major Reno and his 200 men had started in to charge the village, across the river; but it had looked as if they were being drawn on into an ambush; when they had halted, to survey, out had swarmed the Sioux, thicker and thicker. Afoot they came, and ahorse. "Hi-yih hi-yih yip-yip-yip!" had they cried, frightfully. The Rees, on the left flank, had fled pell-mell. The major had dismounted his men in some timber; but no Custer was in sight, the Indians were surrounding, and he had ordered a retreat to the bluff on this side.

That had been a close call. In the retreat Lieutenant Don McIntosh and Lieutenant Benny Hodgson the acting adjutant had been killed, and so had Doctor DeWolf, and "Lonesome" Charley Reynolds, and black Isaiah. Faithful Bloody Knife, too, had fallen; struck down, said somebody, at Major Reno's side. Twenty-nine other men also were dead. A score were missing. The bodies of most of the killed were down there still.

The battalion might have done better had they stayed in the timber by the village and fought dis-

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mounted. But where was Custer? Where was the general?

The bugles shrilled.

“Cease firing, men! Cease firing!” bade the sergeants, along the skirmish line of kneeling men, protecting the bluff.

Now might all pause from squinting over hot carbine barrels, and wipe foreheads. The Indians in the valley were galloping away, along the hills and stream, toward the north.

What was the matter there? Oh! Listen! Custer must be in action. His carbines were rattling fast and faster. Why doesn't he send some word, though? Why was the battalion kept here? Why didn't the major order an advance?

Listen *now*! Crash! Volley firing! And again “Crash!” Another. Surely “Old Curly” was giving it to them heavy. Who was that coming? Ah, McDougall and the packs. Good! The general had sent word for the packs; wasn't it time to push ahead in force and join him, or help him out by attack?

Water was needed; but when soldiers tried to get it from the river below they were promptly fired upon. The shooting in the direction where the general was died away to a fitful clatter; few Indians were to be seen; and at last Major Reno did order a movement north on the bluffs, toward the general. Then the Indians gathered fast and furious, and the command was driven back to the first bluff. The general's bat-

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talion had been in sight, two miles distant, on a hill. At least, over there was an eddy of riding and irregular firing. From the place many Indians suddenly came hurrying to attack the other white soldiers. So it looked as if the general had been defeated and his rear-guard had been defending his retreat.

But why didn't he send a courier through or make signals, to inform the rest of the regiment?

The bluff was a lively spot. Thicker and thicker the Sioux and the Cheyennes were besieging it. From every side, from above as well as from below, shrieked their taunts, whined their bullets. The day was almost spent. As the sun sank into the desolate hills the red foe yelped the louder, fired the faster; every bunch of sage and every rock seemed to harbor an Indian; down by the willow-bordered stream the squaws sang vengefully in the village still standing and triumphant.

Even at twilight the Indians did not dare to charge. Steadily and desperately the soldiers replied to their bullets. Officer and man shot as one; and Ned among them. His stubby cavalry carbine repeatedly jammed on him. It wouldn't extract the shell. On right and left he heard his mates complaining of their carbines also. They must stop and use their knife-blades, to pry loose the shells.

The twilight faded; the dusk settled; and the Indians quit. The reports of rifle and carbine ceased; and for an instant quiet blessed the valley. Ned was

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glad to rise and stretch his cramped legs and back, and look about.

"Hark!" again cautioned somebody. "I hear commands! Troops are coming! Hurrah for Crook!"

"Don't you see them over there? Right over there against the sky-line! Ah—now they've disappeared. But they're coming—Terry or Crook or Custer! Hurrah!"

"Hurrah!" welled the cheers, from this hill and all along the bluff, where the Reno men also were stirred.

"Sound stables, Fletcher," bade Captain Benteen, of Ned. "Loud as you can, to reach them and guide them."

With parched and cracked lips Ned did his best, pealing from his battered trumpet the rollicking, familiar tune:

Come off to the stable all ye who are able,
And give your horses some oats and some corn;
For if you don't do it your colonel will know it,
And then you will rue it as sure as you're born.

"Now listen!"

It did seem as though answering bugle call floated in through the dusk. But after shots had been fired, and more calls had been sounded, officers and men must agree that their hopes deceived them. Nobody was coming. So where was Custer?

Barricades of boxes and horse carcasses were being piled up, and the order went forth to scoop out rifle

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pits, for the next day's fight. The darkness gradually settled. There was no water for coffee, and every mouth was too dry to chew bread. The bluff was miserable, but the village below was gay. Great fires flared redly; and about them the Indians were prancing and yelping in a tremendous scalp dance. With flames and shrieks and hoots and firing of guns and beating of tom-toms the dances lasted all night. But the Indians were not unmindful of the watchers on the bluff; for when Major Reno sent out scouts to find an open way they speedily crept back, with word that they had encountered nothing but Sioux, Sioux, Sioux, everywhere.

No matter; Custer would come, in the morning; and soon would come Terry and Gibbon, and Crook the Gray Fox.

The digging of the little rifle-pits took most of the night. Ned had been helping one of the squads. They had finished their pit, and he had closed his eyes, for a moment (he was so tired!), when he wakened with a jump. Two rifle-shots echoed in his ears. To the signal up-swelled a hideous clamor again, of whoops and rapid reports; the bullets pelted in, ringing upon the rocks and cutting the dry earth and the brittle sage. There was no need for "Assembly"; into the pits dived the men.

The east was barely pink. Dawn scarce had arrived. The hour must be very early. But for white and red the day had begun.

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"Give it to 'em, men; give it to 'em, but be careful how you shoot. Make every bullet tell." The sharp words of Captain Benteen and Lieutenant Gibson, as they walked up and down behind Troop H, steadied the nerves of all.

How fast the bullets rained in! They struck from before and from behind. As the dawn brightened, the feathered chiefs could be seen gesturing and commanding, while hither-thither ran their naked warriors, to occupy better positions. There were swarms of them; *swarms!*

"For the love o' Saint Patrick, but they're all sharp-shooters!" gasped Private McDermott, at Ned's elbow. "An' half o' them are out o' range of us, wid these sawed-off carbines."

So they were—all sharp-shooters. Fast and true their lead picked, picked, at the rifle-pits and barricades; searched the hollow where were herded the pack-mules and the extra horses. Along the line of H company men were being killed, some by bullets from behind. Mules and horses screamed with wounds. Powder reek filled the still air. One's head ached with the noise, one's throat smarted with the smoke.

Major Reno, in his position to the north, must lie low; must lie low Captain Benteen and every other officer. The Indians were creeping closer. By little dashes and rushes they stole up, through the brush.

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With whish and patter arrows began to eke out the hail of bullets.

"Must be short o' ammunition," muttered Private McDermott.

"Wait! I'll get one of those red beggars," exclaimed Private Burns. From his place he crawled forward, hugging the brush, for better aim. On he went, peering; but see! Half-up he sprang, and fell, crumpled into a lax heap.

With exultant whoop a painted, glistening coppery figure darted toward him, speeding like a deer, coup-stick, ten feet long, out-stretched to touch his body and claim a scalp. But half a dozen carbines spoke together, and the painted, glistening coppery figure collapsed to a dully red mass.

Bold? Yes. There between the lines lay soldier and Sioux, while over them passed and repassed bullet and arrow, shout and groan. Truly, the fight was growing more desperate.

"That won't do," spoke Captain Benteen. Major Reno had come over. "We'll have to act quick, or they'll be running into our lines. We must drive them back, major; drive them back."

"Get your men ready for a charge, then," directed the major.

"All ready, men," called the captain, briskly. "Now's your time. Hip, hip, here we go! Give it to 'em! Give it to 'em!"

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“Hurrah!” cheered Lieutenant Gibson.

Out from shelter and down the sagey slope surged the blue-shirted line. Ned took no time to blow the “Charge”; he was shooting. Lead and not brass was needed. The carbines roared, the men shouted fiercely, and for the river broke the Indians.

“Back, men! Get back!” ordered Major Reno, following with the other officers, close behind.

So it was into the rifle-pits again.

Noon was near; either the Indians were out of ammunition, or else they were exhausted, for the firing by them slackened. Acting Adjutant Hare came hastening to Captain Benteen.

“The major’s compliments, and will you advance your skirmish line to cover volunteers getting water.”

The water-getters were making way, by hollow and ravine, toward the river in front. They carried camp-kettles and bunches of canteens. Dangerous work was this, and some of them were wounded; but they filled the canteens. These were handed along the lines. Ah, but it was good, to have a drink at last!

The sun had traveled from east across to the west. The afternoon waxed and waned; sometimes the Indians shot angrily; sometimes they seemed to be resting. What was to occur next? What were they scheming? The officers walked about, bidding the men be ready and not afraid.

“Sure, but looks to me as if the beggars were leavin’,” mused Private McDermott, gazing puzzled.

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Then, toward sunset and the close of this the second day of fighting, from the bluff arose a murmur and a cry. The Indians were quitting, and riding off! 'Twas too good to be true; but nevertheless tipis were falling, as the squaws labored hard to pack the village. Soon billows of fresh smoke rolled up. The grass had again been fired; figures could be seen behind it, fanning it with blankets.

Officers and men stared. In the cool glow of twilight the whole village—or what looked to be the whole village—emerged from the concealing smoke and moved away across the bare plateau which had been the pony pasture.

An enormous, regular mass they made; no wonder that the Seventh Cavalry battalions had not whipped all this people.

“They’re as large as a brigade of the Army of the Potomac, and in as fine order,” pronounced Major Reno, watching from amidst his officers.

However, the Indians might be planning a trap. Eighteen dead and fifty-two wounded was the report of Doctor Porter, the surgeon on the bluff. Major Reno did not dare to venture far, but he moved the companies nearer to the river, for the water. Thus night descended upon Monday, June 26, 1876, by the Little Big Horn.

Tuesday the third day dawned clear and peaceful. Before, the only moving objects were a few Indian ponies grazing in the bottoms; not an Indian lodge-

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fire was to be sighted. Now where was Custer? Where was Crook? When could Terry and Gibbon be expected?

After breakfast the men might sit about, wary but at ease, except the wounded. The sun floated higher, and the sage shimmered with heat. Scarcely a sound broke the aftermath of battle noise, save as magpies croaked hoarsely. Upon a knoll were sitting also Major Reno and Acting Adjutant Hare and Captain Benteen, and other officers—Ned and his fellow orderlies close at hand.

The talk was much upon Custer, and why he did not send word. Some of the officers were impatient with him. But suddenly talk ceased. Major Reno was peering intently through his glass, at the northward. What was that? From the lounging men uprose again a murmur. They were springing to their feet—as sprang to their feet Major Reno and all.

“Sound the assembly, trumpeter! To your posts, gentlemen!” ordered the major.

Against the mountain-tops far down the course of the crooked, half-hidden river was another spume of dust like a brownish cloud. To the hurrying notes of the “Assembly” by bugle after bugle the men hastened from the river below, seized carbines and crouched again in line. The Indians were coming back!

No! The dust did not approach fast enough for

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Indian riders. It was more like the dust of a cavalry or an infantry march. And yet—if Indians it was, could the bluff hold out against them, another day?

Ned felt his heart sink with dread. Evidently Major Reno was doubtful. He pondered, a moment; and wrote rapidly an order.

“I want three men to carry this message through,” he said, to Acting Adjutant Hare. “They’re to go as close as possible to that approaching column, and see what it is. If it’s Indians, they’re to pass on and take this word through to Terry at the Big Horn, so that he’ll hurry. If it’s a white column, they are to turn back at once and let us know. You can ask for volunteers from the ranks. Our Indians are no good. I can’t depend on them.”

Following the line of bluffs had ridden away the three brave couriers. The two battalions must wait.

“That may be Terry, don’t you think, major?” queried Adjutant Hare.

“No. If cavalry, they must be Custer. Terry would hardly have had time to get in this far.”

“Look for the gray horse troop, then,” suggested Captain Benteen. “Troop E; Smith’s. That will tell the story.”

An hour passed; and hurrah, here came the three couriers, hastening along the ridge! With them was a fourth rider. The dust also was nearing; soon the men under it would be in sight.

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The squad of four arrived panting with their haste. The extra man was a scout, by his rig. He was weary and travel-worn.

"'Tis an army column; cavalry and infantry both, sir," reported the corporal of the three couriers; and the strange scout handed to Major Reno a soiled note.

The major read it—read it twice, and passed it to the next officer.

"What do you make of it, gentlemen?" he asked, anxiously. "You say that's Terry yonder?" he queried of the scout:

The scout nodded, and out of drawn face answered.

"Yes, sir."

"And Custer isn't with him?"

"No, sir."

"This note is addressed to General Custer," said Lieutenant Hare; "from General Terry." And he read it aloud: "General: A Crow scout has just come into camp, saying you've been whipped. I don't believe it, but I'm coming with medical aid."

"Tried to get into your lines last night," informed the white scout, "but the blamed Sioux were so thick they held me back. I s'posed you were Custer. Where is Custer, might I ask?"

Whitening face turned to whitening face. Ned knew himself grown pale and shaky with a great fear.

"If Custer didn't meet Terry——"

"And hasn't communicated with us——"

"Or with him——"

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"We must hope for the best, gentlemen," faltered Captain Benteen.

Sped like lightning through the rifle-pits the rumor that the Custer battalion had met a great disaster. Little exclamations of wonder and pity were succeeded by an expectant silence.

But here along the valley, right where had stood the proud Sioux village, appeared the head of the column; appeared cavalry and infantry, under guidon and banner. Hooray for Terry and Gibbon! Hooray for comrades in blue! Hats were swung, grimy hand gripped grimy hand.

On came the column, to the cheering lines. General Terry, leading, was grave. Evidently he bore very bad news. Sober were all the officers with him, sober were the men; and sober grew the awed camp.

"Custer! What about Custer?"

Heads were shaken.

"Don't know yet, for sure. But some command has been killed off, every man, apparently, yonder on those hills. We passed about two hundred stripped bodies."

Ned glimpsed a familiar face. It was that of Curly, the Crow scout. He rushed to Curly.

"Where's the general, Curly? Where's the Long Hair?"

Curly shook his head, as other heads were being shaken.

"Long Hair dead," he said, gutturally. "All

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dead. Me only one left. Let hair down like Sioux, put on Sioux paint, an' ride out. Nearly all killed, then."

So Curly had been with Custer in the fight.

Acting Adjutant Hare's voice was choked, he scarcely could speak, when in due time seeking out Captain Benteen he said:

"The major has the permission of General Terry to send out a company to inspect the battle-field where the bodies were seen. He therefore directs that you take your company, and return as soon as practicable with a report."

Soberly Captain Benteen acknowledged the salute; and soberly rode away with him his men of Company H, including Ned, cavalry trumpeter.

Yes, there they lay, on slope and ridge, two miles from Reno Hill. There they lay: 212 by count, the fighting men of the great white chief Long Hair, overwhelmed by the 2000 fighting men of the great red chiefs Gall and Crazy Horse, and the medicine of Sitting Bull.

Company by company, in retreat from position to position, they could be recognized not by guidon but by officers and men. Here was fair Calhoun and his line; here was dark Captain Keogh and his; here were the Yates men and the Smith men and Tom Custer's, backed by their officers. Here was "Queen's Own" Cook; and "Bos" and little "Autie"; and in the circle of the brave was the general.

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Scalps had been taken, hatchet and club had been at work; but General Custer lay calm and at ease, with two wounds only, and looking much as Ned had seen him look a thousand times before. Even the knife of Rain-in-the-Face had passed him by. Said the Sioux: "Of all the brave men we ever fought, the Long Hair was the bravest."

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Two hundred and sixty-five killed, fifty-two wounded, was the roll-call of the Seventh Cavalry, after this battle of the Little Big Horn, June 25 and 26, 1876. The Sioux fled, Crazy Horse to the east, Sitting Bull to the west. Pursuit was long. Band after band must yield to cavalry and to infantry. American Horse was killed; Iron Dog surrendered; Dull Knife the Cheyenne was defeated; Lame Deer was killed; Two Moons and Hump surrendered; Crazy Horse was defeated, and must surrender; Sitting Bull was twice defeated, and through snow and cold must lead into Canada the few of his people left. Five years after the great battle by the Greasy Grass he, too, surrendered. The United States had bought the Black Hills. But the Chief with the Long Yellow Hair and nigh three hundred of his Seventh Cavalry rode never again.

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